PAYING ATTENTION: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING READERSHIP OF BOSNIAN LIFE WRITING

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Paying Attention: Effective Strategies for Engaging Readership of Bosnian Life Writing

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Literature Review

This research thesis includes a review of life writing (defined as memoirs, diaries, and journals) written by people who lived through or were witness to the Bosnian War in the 1990s. Supporting literature such as critical analyses of memoirs and the genre of memoir, historical writings about the Bosnian War, and political analysis of the time period are included.

Thesis Statement

In order to catch and keep a reader's attention, authors of life writing about the Bosnian War must use effective strategies such as the incorporation of various visuals and appeals to ethics, emotions, and morals to break through barriers to paying attention that readers may have, such as compassion fatigue, desensitization, and indifference.

Theoretical Framework

This research was conducted largely though an approach of literary criticism founded in close readings of primary texts and supplemented by secondary scholarship in the field of memoirs, life writing, and trauma.

Project Description

What are the techniques with which an author of life writing covering the topics of war, genocide, or political distress can combat the compassion fatigue, desensitization, and general indifference their readership may face in reading about these topics? By examining memoirs, diaries, and letters written by people who lived through the Bosnian War (1992 – 1995) and its immediate aftermath, this thesis details specific rhetorical strategies effective authors use and examines how, in a world in which continuous turnover of the news cycle means that seemingly nothing has staying power, an author must employ such strategies in their writing in order to combat the difficulty of grabbing a reader's attention and holding it long enough to have an impact on them or get a point across.

Results of the research point to the effectiveness of authorial strategies that work to elicit reader attention. Examples include the power difference between the concepts of "knowing" and "not knowing," the use of visuals (portraits of people, photographs of important locations or objects with sentimental value, drawings, and graphic memoirs), appeals to a reader's emotions, and understanding authors' purposes in writing.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially those who died in the Bosnian War or lost loved ones or friends during it. It is my sincere hope that this research helps bring awareness to those that have suffered so that they may know they are not forgotten and that the world is still capable of paying attention to them.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 6, 1992, the tranquil life that many Bosnians were accustomed to – and had been accustomed to for generations – was shattered with the first impact of a shell launched into the country's capital city of Sarajevo. What would follow was a nearly four-year-long war rooted in the central conflict of ethnic differences among Bosnia's citizens. Formerly viewed by the majority of the Bosnian people as a country of tolerance that blended religions (Islam, Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianity) and ethnicities (Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs) in communities and even in individual families, the war tore apart this tolerance and instead turned neighbors and friends against each other. Bosnian Serb forces, with backing from Serbia, forcibly displaced thousands of Bosnian Muslims from their homes – killing or wounding thousands more in order to do so – in an effort to ethnically cleanse regions of Bosnia of their Muslim population and establish Serb-dominated regions that contributed to the ideal of a "Greater Serbia." While history books have preserved the events of the war and will continue to analyze its original causes and the failures of the world to properly address the humanitarian crises and genocide that were going on during the war, life writing has preserved the individual, human, personalized experience of the war, including what it was like to live through a time when the humanity of the world seemingly vanished overnight.

What is life writing?

Life writing can take on many forms. Of these, modern-day readers may most often engage with the increasingly popular genre of memoir, though life writing also appears in many other common forms, including letters, journals, diaries, and alternative mediums such as graphic

memoirs.[1] Within the context of the Bosnian War, life writing provides a way for a reader to learn the history of the conflict itself by way of learning the personal history of the people who had to live through such conflict.

Life writing – and this is not exclusive to the writing produced by survivors of the Bosnian War – can often be a matter of life or death. Take a look at the passage that follows, written about a Bosnian man named Miljenko who, in a desperate attempt to maintain his sanity and preserve his story while being forcibly held under house arrest in his own home by Serbs, used the fabric of his home as a medium through which to convey his life writing.:

> With a felt-tip pen he recorded hundreds of thoughts and events on the kitchen walls and tiles. On 6 December he noted the first snowfall of winter. On 8 December he wished his mother a happy birthday. On 5 April he reported the burning of a neighbor's house. He wrote down overheard sentences whispered between his captors '…the evidence is that he'll be prosecuted but he has to feel we're on his side…' On the kitchen doorframe he quoted the words of Ivo Andric, the Bosnian-born Nobel Prize laureate, 'Our humanity is defined by our behavior toward our fellow man.' Then at 11 pm on 11 May Miljenko wrote, 'Police ordered me to open the door. I refused.' Eight days later they broke it down and killed him. (MacLean 56-7)

There is value to the human life and, by preserving the memories and stories of these lives through life writing, that inherent value can be maintained and shared with other people. Such a mindset is critically important for life writing of the Bosnian War because, in many ways, the conflict reduced its victims to lives without value that could be easily dispensed of, forgotten, and destroyed. By engaging in life writing – whether as a writer or reader – a person is making a choice to give value to the life or lives within the text. Such a choice is a conscious one we are all capable of choosing to make, but we often fail to do so. Thus, life writing is an attempt to make such a choice easier by engaging the reader and – as this research paper discusses – making use of effective strategies that help the reader stop and pay attention to the value of a life.

[1] See pp. 3-6 in *Memoir: An Introduction* for a discussion of the current popularity of memoir as a genre.

In Zlatko Dizdarevic's work of life writing, *Sarajevo: A War Journal* (1993), he points out the human tendency to develop compassion fatigue, apathy, and indifference which cause us to stop paying attention to the tragedies occurring around the world and to gloss over the value of lives being lost.:

> We Sarajevans are well aware that the world at large has grown tired of seeing images of horror on the television screen, images of a city dying of hunger and thirst, especially at this time of year when everybody is getting ready to go on vacation. Poor vacationers, they don't deserve to be subjected to scenes of such savagery. Neither do we want these images to haunt your TV screens. To have all our misery and poverty captured by foreign television cameras only makes us feel worse. All we want, from the bottom of our hearts, is to be left alone. We don't want to be scrutinized by an indifferent world. (178)

Dizdarevic and his fellow Sarajevans, despite being in the midst of the longest siege of a city in modern history, feel forgotten and devalued because the world has stopped paying attention to the shelling of their city, the hunger and thirst of their citizens, and the deaths that play out every day on the streets of Bosnia's capital. These are the emotions of personal history that are possible to achieve through life writing and not through history books. Here, as well as in other examples of life writing such as *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), a graphic memoir by Joe Sacco, authors of life writing preserve the emotions and the struggle that accompany the desensitized history of the war. Often, it is desensitization that plays out on media and television and causes readers and viewers to lose their desire to pay attention to that which has become routinized through continuous – and perhaps even "overbearing" – news coverage. "For Sacco, the mainstream media treat news as a commercial commodity that is most valuable when it is timely and sensationalistic" (Kavaloski 6); thus, once news programs ran stories about the Bosnian War, there was only a short window in which these stories would have a sensationalizing effect on readership and viewership. However, suffering does not end once stories fall out of the news cycle, and in many cases it has been left to life writing to record and share the stories of those

whom the news failed to cover and whom the world failed to acknowledge in their losses, sufferings, and tragedies.

In the modern world, the media and the fast-paced lifestyle of the so-called "advanced" societies means that now, more than ever before, the news cycle and sensational stories have even less time in the spotlight and an even smaller chance of grabbing the attention of the world. Part of this is a consequence of the globalization of the world because the entire world is now open to any person with the ability to access the Internet, and this power allows us to choose where our focus and interest lie. No person can keep up with everything happening in the news so we all must make choices about where to pay attention. Consequentially, paying attention in some areas ultimately comes at the expense of other areas and conflicts that remain unrecognized. Sacco provides another relevant example of how the choices we make about where to pay attention come at the expense of other areas with the comparison of the "relative interest in the death of the American activist Rachel Corrie (who was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer in 2003) with that of a Palestinian man, Ahmed el-Najjar, shot by the Israeli Defense forces on the same day" (Salmi 415-16). Sacco "laments [that] only one of these lives is grievable" (Salmi 416) because:

> Lives cannot be apprehended as lost if they are not apprehended as lives first…and grief therefore becomes an indicator of what a society or culture recognizes as a valuable human life. Some lives, named and photographed, are given weight through obituaries and articles (as happened with Corrie, an unknown activist who soon became iconic after her death), while others are turned into impersonal numbers, buried in statistics. (Salmi 416)

Life writing is an attempt to give weight to more names, more photographs, and more people so that the world may remember them not for the importance of being famous or venerated, but simply so that they do not end up forgotten, with their sufferings deemed irrelevant in the grand scheme of the world. Personal, individualized stories are often what most effectively impact

readers and viewers, but both Rachel Corrie and Ahmed el-Najjar had their personal life histories. Unfortunately, the news media chose to preserve and revere just one of these stories – and likely did so because Corrie was a blonde American woman whose face would draw attention and sympathy in the news. However, life writing as a genre is becoming increasingly more open to the average person to preserve memories and stories of lives themselves and not need to rely on mainstream media for such preservation. G. Thomas Couser notes the rise of the "nobody memoir," and this power, especially within the context of conflicts like the Bosnian War, has helped make more lives "grievable" as they should be because "contemporary memoir has been a threshold genre in which some previously silent populations have been given voice for the first time" (Couser 12).[2] The "nobody memoir" argues that life writing should not be reserved for only those who are famous or revered already, but rather that no life out-values another and all lives can be worthy of preservation through life writing, which is a culturally and historically significant development.

Life writing produced during wars or conflicts is often dark, disheartening, and sad – and often something the average person would not choose to off-handedly pick up and engage with. Because of its personal perspective into the suffering and tragedy of lives lived through such conflicts, these texts can undoubtedly be difficult to read or bear, yet critics like Cathy Caruth argue that engaging with them is critical, no matter how difficult. Because it can be difficult to encourage readers to engage with such topics, life writing "has to earn its readers the old-fashioned way: on its own merits," meaning it "must either offer an extraordinary story...or be an engaging read, a 'page-turner'" (Couser 145). With this as the goal, authors of life writing interact with their readers in a different way than, for example, authors of fiction works. In

[2] See "Contemporary American Memoir" (pp. 140-68) in G. Thomas Couser's *Memoir: An Introduction* for a discussion of the rise of the "nobody memoir" and characteristics of this growing genre.

fiction, the author asks for the reader to follow the story they tell and to feel the associated emotions created by the work. However, no matter how real those emotions may be in the reader, the narrative is ultimately not real. Of course, with life writing, the narratives are – or at least should be – real.[3] Thus, when an author of life writing uses strategies to create an effect within their readers, the engagement they are asking for is much more significant. Caruth believes that the relationship between author and reader is "a plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken…. [to] the new mode of reading and listening that both the language of trauma and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand" (Caruth 9). This demand for awakening echoes the call for the readership to pay attention to the suffering of others. Inherent in this call is the ethical and moral obligation to respond to life writing because "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, [but rather] that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma" (Caruth 24).

Life writing is indeed a way of preserving the history of individual lives as well as the time periods and events the writers lived through. Life writing about the Bosnian War is particularly important for the preservation of this period's history because, compared to similar historical events such as the Holocaust, the Bosnian War and the human rights violations, ethnic cleansing, and genocide that occurred during the conflict are much less well-known and well-researched. Even within the context of life writing, the Holocaust takes precedence over the Bosnian War and other genocides that occurred during the 20th century. This means that paying attention is even more important because it must be a conscious choice to do so, as the Bosnian

[3] See "Memoir's Ethics" (pp. 79-107) in G. Thomas Couser's *Memoir: An Introduction* for more information about the responsibility of memoir to its subjects and the historical record, as well as general factual accuracy in memoir and examples of memoir hoaxes.

War is not a topic that continues to cycle through academic research or mainstream media anywhere near as frequently as the Holocaust does. Many of us – even if we have not read the works ourselves – are aware of such examples of Holocaust life writing as Elie Weisel's *Night* (1960), Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947), and *Maus* (1980, 1992), the two-part graphic memoir produced by Art Spiegelman. These are the heavyweights of this genre of life writing that addresses genocide and the sufferings of those who experienced the war, but they – along with other Holocaust life writing examples – often draw so much attention to themselves that it comes at the expense of other similar works. Thus, paying attention to life writing from the Bosnian War and other humanitarian crises and conflicts is important because it demonstrates that all lives lost during such tragedies are equally felt and that no lives are considered more "grievable" or valuable than others.

While some degree of a reader's ability or inclination to pay attention to life writing must come from their individual conscious choice to do so, a large part of maintaining a hold on that attention comes from strategies authors use in their writing to affect their readership. This focus on authorial strategies is the most effective way to research a topic that is largely based on emotional responses, which are ultimately unique to each individual reader. However, by highlighting strategies used in each text and discussing the ways in which they engage readers, it is possible to make a subjective topic much more objective and create legitimate research that evaluates the functions of texts to create emotional responses rather than just an evaluation of such responses. Intimately tied to this purpose of examining exactly what it is in Bosnian life writing narratives that affects readers is my own personal experience reading such narratives. The scope of this research project was born from my long-held interest in the Bosnian War that first started when I learned about the war for the first time in 2014. At that time, less than twenty

years had passed since the end of the war yet I had never heard about it before and it was not a topic we covered in any of my history classes at school. I felt this to be an egregious omission from my education as a citizen of the world and took it upon myself to learn all that I could about this conflict and the tragedies that occurred during it. The research included in this project is informed by my own experience and is partly a desire to know what engaged *me* as a reader when I first ventured into the field of Bosnian War life writing. This research is also an attempt to understand why people fail to be engaged by the genre at all and what it would take for authors to be able to hold their reader's attention – or grab it in the first place.

Because the project is tied to my own personal experience, included alongside the traditional research thesis are two creative components in the form of a short narrative poem and a personal essay. These arose as the consequence of being affected by what I read to such a degree that I felt I needed to respond by engaging with the weight of those narratives and the importance of those stories. These creative components are responses to effective authorial strategies that had an impact on me and even though I do not, in this research thesis, discuss the texts that first inspired my interest in Bosnia, the discussion of strategies authors use to create an effect on their readership helps to demonstrate why I first stopped to pay attention, as well as to model one form of what engaging with life writing narratives as a reader can look like.

All three components of this project are interworking and are connected through their main themes of stopping to pay attention and engaging in reading that creates emotional impact. Though all three works take different approaches to the topic, they combine to create a joint project that truly expresses the scope of my interest in the Bosnian War and the life writing produced by survivors of it. The first component, the narrative poem (Appendix A), is an imagined experience of a modern-day arrival to Bosnia's capital Sarajevo and what it is like, as a

reader who understands how the war affected the city, to be present in that city with the emotional weight that comes with being an informed visitor. The personal essay (Appendix B) deals first-hand with my personal life experience as I first engaged with this topic, and details the various emotions of this experience of learning about the war and being frustrated by my failure to know of it before. Also included are the frustrations that come with recognizing the general failure of the world to pay attention to what occurred in Bosnia during the war. I believe having these two creative components that discuss reader response to Bosnian life writing, in addition to the literary research project which analyzes the strategies authors use to create such reader response, is the only way to present a fully comprehensive project encompassing the complexity of the topic and the inherent emotions that come with studying such material.

CHAPTER I

KNOWING VS. NOT KNOWING

Introduction

"Jews, listen to me! I can see a fire! There are huge flames! It is a furnace!" (Wiesel 23)

So screams Madame Schächter, the thought-to-be-mad woman on Elie Wiesel's train to Birkenau in 1944. In a train car packed full of Jews, she is the only one who sees these fires. As unsettling for the rest of the Jews (and the reader) as it is to hear her cry out over something no one else can see, they are even more afraid when they arrive in Birkenau and see those fires she has foreseen for themselves.

With this, we begin a discussion of the successful authorial strategy of emphasizing situations of "not knowing" in order to create an emotional response within the reader and to properly depict the true horror of many events the reader encounters.

"Not knowing" may take many forms and is defined here as being disadvantaged by not having a complete understanding of the world, or suffering from a power imbalance in which an opposing group or force has more information and thus more power. Whether it is the not knowing of an innocent child, the not knowing of an unaware animal left on its own, the not knowing of the life or death status of one's family and friends, or the not knowing about what the future – if there is one – will be like, this concept figures prominently into the narrative power of life writing of the Bosnian War.

Often, what one wants in a normal life is to not have to know what one now does, which is a sentiment echoed by many: ""I just want a normal life" is frequently said" (*Sjećam Se*, "Women Refugees"). However, the "not knowing" described by examples of Bosnian life

writing shows that a reversion to such bliss is impossible and that for many – even as they write their journal, diary, memoir, letters, etc. – "not knowing" is far beyond nostalgia for the past and is instead a life-or-death concept played out daily while endangered by those with the power of knowing.

Children and Not Knowing

We normally think about children as safe from conflict. Historically, women and children have been protected and sheltered behind the battle lines while the men of a society are left to fight the enemy. We even see this mindset in the unwritten rules of film, television, and art, in which the social expectations that children will not be killed (or at least not shown to be) is widely accepted – though not always followed. Real life – and especially life during war – follows this code much less, and it is the violations of this social code that make the killings of children even more egregious and offensive in the Bosnian War. Those who kill indiscriminately and without regard for humanity need not know who they are killing, only that they are; the consequences for the children though, is that their future is entirely cast into peril and the quality of what that future will be like is constantly in doubt.

As the emblem of childhood in the Balkans during the 1990s, Zlata Filipović is a good launching point for the effects of "not knowing" as they relate to children. Though nearly all of *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Wartime Sarajevo* (2006) is a powerfully impactful piece in which a young girl processes the horrors and difficulties of war, perhaps most eerie are the comparisons made to Anne Frank. These comparisons begin voluntarily when Filipović decides (just one week before the official start of the Bosnian War) to name her diary "Mimmy" in reference to Anne Frank calling her diary "Kitty." Here we see a powerful example of the "not knowing" concept in which Filipović knows of Anne Frank and her fate, but surely cannot yet

imagine that her own will dangerously parallel Frank's plight. Though we can safely assume that the then ten-year-old Filipović did not have authorial strategies of stirring emotional responses in readers on her mind when she made such a comparison, her writing still achieves this effect because she invokes what is likely the most well-known example of a person who perished during the Holocaust. The weight that comes with such an invocation of a Holocaust icon is certainly substantial, and invokes the horrors of what can result from "not knowing."

For Filipović, what started as a model for naming one's diary is, a year and a half later, no longer a lighthearted naming game. Fully realizing the similarity of their situations, she begins to worry: "Some people compare me with Anne Frank," Filipović says. "That scares me, Mimmy. I don't want to suffer her fate" (Filipović 159-160). Though people recognized the similarities between Frank and Filipović early on, Filipović cannot have known whether she would or would not suffer such a fate. It is this suspense-like element about Filipović's fate that permeates the diary with a sense of foreboding; this sense is only fended off by the present-day picture of Filipović that graces the back cover of the book and her preface to the diary, which are both clear evidence that she survived the war.

By many comparisons, Filipović was lucky. Able to obtain permission to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina first for Paris and then for England, she was able to reclaim a sense of her life and her childhood. In her final reference to Anne Frank, Filipović makes her ultimate wish that "I will not suffer the fate of Anne Frank. That I will be a child again, living my childhood in peace" (Filipović 181). With the knowledge that she did not suffer Frank's fate, the horror of the comparison to Anne Frank becomes transferrable to the general horror shared by all children of the war who had their childhood ripped from them.

The loss of one's childhood brings about many questions we cannot know the answers to. 'What would my life have been like had this war never started?' 'What will my future hold?' 'How will I grow up in a world in which such horrors were allowed to happen?' These questions are not exclusive to being asked by children but they are ever more poignant due to the general understanding of a child's innocence and the nearly ubiquitously accepted principles of society's obligation to protect its children. Adding additional impact is the subsequent realization that we are "not knowing" the answers to such questions, and in fact can never adequately answer them.

For readers, many of us who likely took our peaceful childhoods for granted, the loss – not only of childhood but sometimes of life – that writers such as Zlatko Dizdarević in *Sarajevo: A War Journal* describes is shocking. With straightforward bluntness, Dizdarević relates that "in Sarajevo a three-year-old girl playing outside her home is hit by a sniper's bullet" (15). There are many layers of "not knowing" here, as well as many layers of horror. What likely affects the reader most is that the child, just three years old, could not have a full understanding of the dangers of playing outside. Consequentially, that which was being enjoyed as a simple pleasure turned into the end of an all-too-short life. The father of the child, a man who is capable of "forgiving the wild beasts for being wild beasts, for being debased by an evil that destroys every human impulse" (Dizdarević 15), laments not only the loss of the present life, but the loss of the potential of his child's life. What could the child have become? What could the child have done to change this world? These are more questions to add onto those previously mentioned in the category of "not knowing."

Additional layers of "not knowing" include the practicalities of the killing. Using Dizdarević's notion that the bullet you hear coming is not one meant for you, the one you do not hear will be the one that ends your life. Such suddenness is a horrifying aspect of the "not

knowing" theme, and the suddenness of the death of the child, who had no way of knowing what was coming, is alarming. When one also considers that the bullet issued forth from the hills surrounding Sarajevo, from which the "unknown assassin" (Dizdarević 15) coldly picks out their hits, the disparity between the snipers and the victims is reduced to the power difference caused by knowing and not knowing.

Unfortunately, Dizdarević has plenty of examples of the violence against children who cannot know what is happening. The number of examples is enough to overwhelm the reader, but further rhetorical successes come from the unwavering starkness with which Dizdarević continues to relate such horrors. In an entry titled "An Encounter with the Future," Dizdarević challenges us with this line: "There may be some who think that a four-month-old baby who has just had a leg amputated will never try to find out why she was "born" without a leg and why others were not" (Dizdarević 100). Not only is the mental image of a baby having a leg amputated due to injuries from shrapnel sickening, it is another powerful example of the relation between "not knowing" and the loss of one's childhood.

This child, whose missing leg will serve as a continuous reminder of the war, had only one month of peace in her life before the war began. (The entry date of July 12, 1992 puts the child's birth in March of 1992, just one month before the Bosnian War began on April 6, 1992.) From this point on, the war will always be with her in a physical way that will require an explanation and will at least partially result in an identity formed by a war she cannot personally recollect. Tied to the harsh reality of the child not being able to fully know itself except by way of others explaining to her the reason she is missing a leg is the very real understanding of the danger that "The Future" is in. For Dizdarević, in this entry, that future is symbolically represented by the children of Sarajevo, the ones who, in a peaceful society that had remained

guided by morals, ethics, and social codes, would never have been harmed. The children of Sarajevo are harmed, though, and many are in hospitals "begin[ning] their new lives as mutilated, amputated, permanently handicapped people" (Dizdarević 99) to whom someone will have to explain why they are missing their arms, their legs, and often their families. It is a horror a reader cannot ignore.

More subtle horrors lie in a discussion of the "not knowing" of what could have been the futures of the children of Bosnia. Perhaps those who can most fully recognize the loss of potential are the teachers whose jobs are to help children fully realize their own. In the two entries in *I Remember = Sjećam Se* written by teachers who have ended up in refugee camps, it is the sadness of the teachers that first catches our attention. "I cried, and I simply did not believe all of it" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #9) one says; the other, "Never again will I step into a classroom. After this I have nothing to say" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #5). Present in the teachers' emotions is a sense of failure on behalf of taking care of their students. Though one teacher wishes "for one, only one more class: to make noise, all together, to make noise, scream; to scream so that we could be heard to the end of the world, and to the heavens, to God" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #5), the war is much bigger than her individual hope – and bigger than all the innocents.

Primary among those innocents are the children of Bosnia who, due to the war, had to forgo their schooling. Here the concept of "not knowing" is also pervasive. As the primary formative experience of childhood, the loss of the chance to go to school not only causes a forfeiture of future knowing, but also impacts the present by a disruption of the routine by which humans often come to know themselves. In one teacher's entry, "a large group from my class came to school, although the other classes did not come. It was Nedima's birthday….We always celebrated birthdays in our classrooms" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #9). These children risked going to

school to celebrate a classmate's birthday to preserve a sense of community and regularity, and as a way to brighten up their lives. Such a sentiment has power for readers who, by way of natural comparison between themselves and what they read, will feel the subsequent impact of a childhood disrupted and the danger these children risked simply to celebrate a classmate's birthday. When this entry concludes with "It was the last day of school and the last lesson – a birthday lesson: "Children, there will be no more school until further notice"" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #9), the sense of loss is complete as students are left with nothing to study and nothing to look forward to anymore. There will be no more birthdays to celebrate, no more lessons to learn, and much less "knowing" going on.

Though this version of "not knowing" is not as overtly horrifying as Dizdarević's observations of the violence children endured during the Bosnian War, the implications are still significant, especially when, as a young woman named Alisa Salkic points out, the concept of "not knowing" becomes institutionalized. "In any case, the history we're taught stops with Tito," she says, referring by nickname to Josip Broz, the communist revolutionary who was integral to the formation of Yugoslavia. "The war isn't spoken about at school," she says (MacLean 36). For Salkic, a Bosnian Muslim who lost 23 members of her family during the war, the history of the war is all-too-current and will be something she can never forget. However, as the Bosnian War becomes more and more an event of the past, and the number of those who lived through it decreases over time, the failure to teach about the war in schools becomes perhaps the most dangerous sense of "not knowing."

Animals and Not Knowing

In much the same way that society generally understands children to be off-limits for being killed in movies, TV, and art, so, too, do we as viewers expect animals to be spared. Often,

we may even feel more emotion for the death of an animal than we might for a human being. Because of many viewers' personal experiences with pets and the fact that animals need no character development in order for us to root for them, we are usually shocked when animals are killed. Consequentially, the authorial representations of animals in life writing about the Bosnian War is an effective strategy, especially when coupled with an understanding of their innocence and their relation to the concept of "not knowing."

Filipović presents the conundrum of grieving for animals in a world in which humans are also frequently dying: "I know terrible things are happening, people are being killed, there's a war on, but still…I'm so sorry. She [Zlata's cat Cici] cheered us all up, made us smile, filled up our hours" (Filipović 162-63). Filipović's "sorry" speaks to the innocence of animals. Though some animals are presented as having an uncanny understanding of being left behind – "My cat Mira…she knew I was leaving. Yes, she knew it very well" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #12) – one of the most effective strategies is to invoke the sadness of living beings that are dependent upon caretakers being left to fend for themselves. Dizdarević writes that "someone claims to have seen a peacock and a white swan, both solitary, roaming in sad freedom" and that "a few ponies are still wandering around in that no-man's-land" (156). Because the zookeepers were unable to go to the Sarajevo zoo and attend to the animals that lived there, some escaped and were roaming around the besieged city while others such as the lions, tigers, wolves, and foxes – the apex predators of their native environments – were all reduced to innocent casualties of war, starving to death because of a conflict these animals cannot have known the cause of.

These animals, many of them out of place not only in a city but in an ecosystem they are not used to, represent a tremendous loss of life. Zoos are built as a way to collect the exoticism and beauty of the animal kingdom in one place for humans to study and admire. Thus, it feels

like an egregious crime when these animals have their adopted world destroyed and when they are largely forgotten about as people focus on their individual concerns for survival. Just more than 200 days into a war that will last years, Dizdarević writes that "the last grizzly bear has died – quietly, they say" and the previously mentioned wandering ponies "are the last survivors; all the others have been caught and butchered" (156). It has taken very little time to reduce these animals to casualties of an absence of knowing.

In addition to the exotic animals that are left to fend for themselves, domestic pets are also victims of the war. What stands out most about them is that, often, pets are thought of as parts of the family yet sometimes become collateral damage in relation to surviving for the war. Whether one wants to realize it or not, pets are part of the family only to a certain point. As the owner of Mira in *Sjećam Se* writes, "I was packing the most needed things" (*Sjećam Se,* entry #12). Notably, this does not – and likely cannot – include her cat Mira. This vulnerability of pets – being important and loved by a family until that family must leave the pet behind – creates an emotional response in the reader. Even though the woman writes that her cat knows she is leaving, the cat cannot have knowledge about why or whether the woman will ever come back. At least with children there is some hope of being able to explain to them the dangers of the war and why choices must be made, but with animals – and even those who we feel can perceive the tensions of war – one cannot explain to them the concepts of extreme nationalism, deteriorating ethnic relations, or the reason some people believe their own lives are more valuable than others. Thus, the pets are left unknowing and to struggle for their own survival.

As someone who had a pet canary – Cicko – and whose family adopted an abandoned kitten – Cici – a friend found during the war, Filipović presents more varieties of "not knowing." In one example, not knowing appears as a practical problem of not knowing whether you can

even take care of your pets – "We've run out of bird food for Cicko. There's no bird food anywhere in town. What can we do?" (Filipović 123) – especially when Filipović and her family hardly have any food for themselves to eat. It is a situation that is undeniably sad, and one that comes with a truth most people would rather not have to know: while we certainly love our pets, humans come – and eat – first. In another instance of not knowing, Filipović is unsure about whether her animals can even be safe: "We put Cicko in the kitchen. He's safe there, although once the shooting starts there's nowhere safe except the cellar" (Filipović 42) and "[Cici] must be lucky. Who knows whether she'd still be alive. She could have been hit by shrapnel, or died of hunger or been attacked by a stray dog" (Filipović 66). Throughout her diary, Zlata is always diligent about mentioning where her pets are and how they are doing. She thinks of them as family members and rejoices in the happiness they can bring to her and her family during bleak days. Her feelings towards her pets are relatable for many readers and thus the fates of her pets, something she knows all too well (an inversion of the "not knowing" theme), is quite painful to witness as a reader. When her canary dies, Zlata writes that "I miss him. He's left a big gap. I keep thinking I'm going to hear his lovely song, but there's no Cicko, and no song" (Filipović 129). Four months later, when her cat Cici also dies, the "very very sad news: OUR CAT IS NO MORE" (Filipović 161-62) is made all the more sad by an earlier entry in which Filipović writes that "Cici has brightened up this misery of a life. How you can come to love an animal!" (73).

Filipović painfully witnessed the deaths of both her pets but for people such as the woman who owned the cat Mira, the pain comes from not knowing her cat's fate. While it is likely safe to assume that the cat perished after she left, the woman is haunted by the last living look from her cat: "[Mira's] face and the look in her eyes are in front of me all the time" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #12). It is a haunting sense of loss the woman feels because it is also tied into feelings

of guilt for abandonment of a creature she cared about but failed to be able to help. Such a failure is similar to those feelings expressed by the teachers' entries in *Sjećam Se* and Dizdarević's regrets about the failures of the Bosnian people to know how to protect the nation's children from the unspeakable horrors of war. Just like the children of Bosnia, "even animals suffer here. Even they aren't spared by the war" (Filipović 68).

Dramatic Irony and Not Knowing

The strategies discussed thus far that concern "not knowing" have largely been authorial devices that have made a direct impact on the readership. Now, we take a break from a discussion of such strategies to move to an examination of how the reader's knowledge that they bring with them to reading life writing affects the impact of the text. This is primarily evident through the knowing and not knowing that comes with dramatic irony. Usually, dramatic irony is a strategy purposely employed by the author to create suspense, humor, or to increase the emotional involvement of the audience. While these purposes are also viable in the field of memoirs and life writing, dramatic irony can function differently in life writing because the roles are somewhat reversed in that the reader often knows more than the writer can or did. Thus, it is the reader's extra knowledge that creates the dramatic irony they experience, and the effect is less the result of an authorial strategy; instead, the author's "knowing" is contrasted with the reader's "knowing" and the differences between them creates the dramatic irony within the text. This is especially true with examples of life writing from the Bosnian War, including those examples such as *Sarajevo: A War Journal* and *Zlata's Diary* that were written contemporaneously with the events of the war they describe and without a knowledge of when the end of the war will come. For diaries and journals such as these, the fact that the published work is comprised of individual entries written in response to very immediate concerns means

that each entry discusses events that are felt and experienced without any benefit of knowing how they will turn out and without the aid of reflection or later recollection of the events.

In this way, the very nature of the life writing contributes to the uncertainty of not knowing. When we read Filipović's diary, for example, we are aware of her fate even while she must wonder about her own safety and when the war will end. This creates an eerily unsettling effect of knowing ahead of time whether her hopes and fears will be realized. Having an understanding of the timeline of the Bosnian War and the history of the region creates an effective strategy that is entirely out of the author's control. When Filipović writes on September 20, 1993 that "all eyes and ears are on tomorrow's game of War or Peace" (Filipović 178), the reader's knowing that the war won't officially end until December 14, 1995 gives all of her hopes a cruel sense of irony. When peace talks unsurprisingly fall through, Filipović writes "although I told you that I didn't think anything good would happen…I still had a flicker of hope that it would" (Filipović 179). As a reader reading with a knowledge of the timeline of the war – and reading long after the young Filipović hoped for the end of the war and its disruption of her life – it is difficult to engage with the text without being able to warn Filipović that she has more than two years left to go until she will see any semblance of peace in her homeland.

Similar ironies occur when reading *Sarajevo: A War Journal*. Not only does Dizdarević also long for the end of the war without knowing how much longer he will have to wait – and without having the ability of Filipović to leave Bosnia before the end of the war – but he also references events of which he cannot even fully predict the future importance, most notably that of Srebrenica. Dizdarević's representation of Srebrenica in 1993 is already bleak – "the first protected zone for Muslims, Srebrenica: thousands of people who have no idea what to do next packed into a small space, without work and without any foreseeable improvement in their

deplorable condition" (Dizdarević 176) – but he cannot know what is coming: the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys just two years later in this "protected zone." In this way the reader has a knowledge that informs their reading of passages such as this and a knowledge Dizdarević clearly cannot have at the time of his writing.

In addition to such examples of dramatic irony, hindsight creates dilemmas of the reader knowing that which the authors did not at their time of writing. Usually, to say that something is life-or-death is to grossly over exaggerate, but the Bosnian War illustrates that issues of knowing and not knowing are often issues of life or death because of the extreme power difference that comes with the disparity between knowing and not knowing. The book *Missing Lives* (2010) provides the reader with some disturbing examples of the life-or-death consequences of knowing and not knowing. For just one example, take what a Croatian neighbor said to Alisa Salkic's mother after Croatian soldiers killed Alisa's father: "You never expected us to be the ones to kill you. We are happy to surprise you" (MacLean 34). There is inherent power that comes with knowing that which others do not, and often those left unknowing are also the ones who are vulnerable. As a reader, this calls forth a response that breaks through any sense of emotional indifference held towards those who were essentially blindsided by the violence their former neighbors, coworkers, and friends could suddenly inflict upon them. The plight of the Bosnian Muslims (also known as Bosniaks) is further emphasized by the fact that Bosnian Serbs, too, knew what was to be done to the Bosniaks. In one such story in *Missing Lives*, a Bosniak woman named Kadefa Rizvanovic describes being betryaed by a Bosnian Serb friend:

> She seemed as surprised as me by the Serbian check points that had sprung up along the road. I felt frightened – remember I was Muslim and eight months pregnant by then – so I got off the bus to walk home through the woods. That evening Milada [Rizvanovic's Bosnian Serb friend] and I had dinner together, as we often did, and she said nothing about it. But she knew. All the Serbs knew what was going to happen. (MacLean 85-86)

The ability of a "friend" to sit idly by while Serbian forces planned a systematic removal of Bosnaiks from their land by any means necessary is shocking and an example of the life-or-death consequences that come with not knowing. At the end of the war, Rizvanovic, who lost her husband in the war, has only one wish: "to see my old friend Milada again. To face her and say, "Why didn't you tell me?"" (MacLean 88). By this point, of course, it is too late to be saved by knowing; Serbs and Croats had already exercised their power that came with knowing and all Rizvanovic could gain from seeing Milada would be the potential for trying to understand her friend's betrayal.

Practical Consequences of Not Knowing

The theme of not knowing is present in at least some way in every example of life writing that deals with living through the Bosnian War. At some point, every author, their friends and family, and the nation as a whole deal with questions they do not know the answers to, such as when the war will end, whether they as individuals will survive, and what will become of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The issue of not knowing also manifests itself in more immediate concerns present throughout the life writing, including, for example, questions of how individuals will eat tomorrow when there is no food to be had except that which can be purchased with exorbitant amounts of Deutsche Marks. Practical consequences of not knowing are further discussed in *Missing Lives*, a book dedicated as an homage to the pain and suffering caused by not knowing the whereabouts of loved ones who disappeared during the Bosnian War. Such people are "locked in agonizing limbo, unable to grieve, to claim inheritance, to sell property, to remarry or – most poignantly – to hold a funeral" (MacLean 7). For those of us who are outsiders to the region, when seeing this continuation of "not knowing" which is addressed in *Missing Lives* fifteen years after the official end of the war, we come to realize that the war is not truly over for

many citizens because it lingers in their lives through such practical consequences. The inability to know the practicalities of life during the war, such as whether one will survive or how one will feed their family, whether one's family is even alive, and whether it will be possible to move on with one's life if one's family is gone, is all very difficult for those who must find a way to answer such questions and readers who are witness to people trying to process the answers they have. Even the author of *Missing Lives* cannot resist remarking on the sadness and despair implicit in not knowing; MacLean inserts his emotional opinion into the discussion of practical consequences with his "most poignantly" in reference to the inability to hold a funeral. Amidst all the horrors of the Bosnian War, and all the different realms of not knowing that are possible, one woman closes our discussion of knowing and not knowing with this: "There is no greater suffering than not knowing where a loved one is buried" (MacLean 58).

CHAPTER II

VISUALS

Introduction

Across all platforms of communication, our media and representation styles are evolving and expanding. Technological progress throughout the 20th century moved us away from solely relying on the printed newspaper or the radio for our connections to the outside world. Visual media has been expanding rapidly through the advent of video cameras, smartphones, and new twists on old jobs, such as photojournalism. The growth of the genre of graphic memoir has been another such advancement. G. Thomas Couser calls graphic memoirs "not only new, but postmodern, since they deploy a medium considered "low" or popular to treat serious, sometimes tragic materials" (Couser 12-13). However, whether we consider it "low" or not, the graphic narrative has loudly announced its entrance into the realm of life writing.

Whether these graphic narratives were born out of a "wound culture that demands fresh images to sustain its appetite" (Walker 70) or arose simply because the new genre "licenses or authorizes memoirs by those whose talent is primarily in visual art" (Couser 160) – thus allowing for the sharing of even more life narratives – the graphic memoir has indeed become an effective life writing tool. The graphic memoir has also begun to deal with some of the darkest periods of human history, including various genocides and the suffering and consequences that come with living through times of political distress. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is Art Spiegelman's two-volume *Maus* collection that deals with his father's experience as a survivor of the Holocaust, but the graphic memoir has also surfaced on the topic of the Bosnian War and the genocide that occurred throughout the Balkans during the 1990s. Consequentially, a large

portion of this section will be dedicated to analyzing one such memoir that deals with the Bosnian War. Along with this analysis, this section will also discuss how taking an illustrated or visual approach to the presentation of such topics works as an effective strategy to break through to readership. This can be done in many different forms, including the physical presentation of words on the page, informative graphics, drawings, portraits, and pictures. The importance of these visuals in life narratives that are coming out of the Balkan region extends far beyond any single visual style and this section will consider the range of different ways that authors can use visuals to effectively convey or supplement the points of their writing.

Portraits and Pictures

Pictures (defined here as photographs of people, places, landscapes, objects, etc.) and portraits (defined as head-and-shoulders photographs of individual humans) are a very important and impactful visual strategy. Without the need for graphic rendering or artistic interpretation, both pictures and portraits capture what *is*, as it is, though the choices about what is included in the frame – and what is inevitably left out – affect our understanding of what is shown. While there is truth in photographs, there is still room for authors and/or photographers to make use of certain strategies with their photographs in order to achieve the effects they desire and to have an impact on their readership. In *Zlata's Diary*, for example, the first five pictures (provided by Zlata herself) show her before the war, growing up with birthdays, friends, and innocence. The rest of the photos that follow (which were taken by reporters) convey the sense of a news camera following Zlata around as she proceeds through life in the new "normal" of the war. Though she was living in a time of war, none of the photographs are graphic, nor do they document the violence that was going on around her. The photographs chosen convey a sense of optimism and perseverance; Zlata is either smiling or wears a pleasant expression in all of them that she

appears in. The photographs give little to no visual suggestions about the horrors of the war; there are no bullet holes, no death, no rubble documented in the visuals included in *Zlata's Diary*; instead, we see hopeful moments such as Zlata and her mother managing to bake bread during the war and pictures of pages from her diary with eclectic artwork pasted onto the paper. Additionally, the full-color photographs provide a stark contrast to the often bleak outlook of the focus of her diary during the war. The result of these strategies is that the visuals add to the presentation of the diary as a ray of hope for the Bosnian community. In her diary Zlata discusses the focus the international press puts on her and her story, and it is clear that she is championed as the poster child of the innocent youth of the country. Her story is ultimately a happy one that ends with being able to escape her war-stricken home for Paris and then England. The pictures included in her diary parallel this ultimately hopeful tone and have the ability to visually uplift readers of the diary.

In stark contrast to the hopeful tone of the visuals of *Zlata's Diary* are those of *Sarajevo: A War Journal*. Though the authors of these two books are similar in their use of journal/diary entries as their writing style, they differ in their tone and also in what they are writing about and focusing on during the Bosnian War. In his journal, Zlatko Dizdarević produces life writing that wholly condemns the loss and devaluation of life going on around him. Included in his journal are ten pictures that visually depict the horrors of the war and show the senselessness of a war that is destroying life for innocent citizens. In stark black and white, the pictures show prominent Sarajevo buildings reduced to nothing but rubble, injured children, graves and cemeteries, and the very real hardships of life during the war. To see a picture of a man running hunched over with water jugs in his hands and the caption "Under sniper fire, water means life" means there can be no confusion about what the visuals chosen by Dizdarević to be included with his journal

are there to do. The inclusion of pictures – and pictures of this nature – is an effective strategy to help visually reinforce the inhumanity of the war and the changes it thrust upon those who had to live – or die – through it.

Both *Zlata's Diary* and *Sarajevo: A War Journal* make effective choices concerning the visuals included within their pages. In both cases the pictures aid in the establishment of tone and parallel the trajectories of the two works. However, in these two works, pictures do not predominate in the reader's experience; words are still the primary factor in achieving an impact on readership. The opposite is true for the book *Missing Lives*, however. Born as a union between writer Rory MacLean and photojournalist Nick Danziger, *Missing Lives* uses both pictures and portraits to convey what words cannot and to create a tremendous impact on those experiencing the work. *Missing Lives* handles the stories of fifteen families who are still missing children, parents, relatives, or friends due to the Bosnian War. Analyzing the construction and ordering of the book shows just how chilling the effective use of visuals can be.

Each story in *Missing Lives* begins with a full-page portrait of an individual who could be understood to be the "main sufferer" in relation to the missing life. The portrait, a headshot done in vivid color, is always situated on the left-hand page while the text begins on the right-hand page. These portraits play a very important role in the visual establishment of the tone of each story. In no portrait are any individuals smiling or showing any suggestions of joy or hope; all could be said to be stoic, hardened, removed, or resilient, but it is visually clear – without even needing to read the text – that this is a book that chronicles human suffering. As readers, when confronted by these powerful portraits, we are imbued with a sense of the emotion we are encouraged to carry throughout the story that follows. In a way, the portraits model for the reader

the type of response we should experience as we pay our respects to those who have lost loved ones and those who have been lost in a kind of homage the reader performs through reading.

These portraits preface the heartbreaking stories that follow, but each story is then concluded by a series of pictures that correspond to the most intimate, moving parts of the text and create further emotional responses in the reader. Just as the individual portraits are carefully crafted to convey a mixture of both resiliency and loss in the faces of the survivors, the pictures that follow each story also are carefully selected in order to create emotional responses for readers of *Missing Lives*. These pictures can be broken down into four general types: pictures of locations, pictures of graves and/or cemeteries, pictures of photographs, heirlooms, or remnants, and pictures of the survivors living "normal" lives.

Photographer Nick Danziger is not shy about photographing people in places that are most painful for them and that are most painfully intertwined with the stories of their loss. This is why we see, for example, a young Alisa Salkic standing in the room where her father was executed, or a photograph of the cliff where Muharem and Suvada Eleozovic's two sons were executed and pushed over the edge into the ravine below. These visuals help the reader connect to the painful realness of each story and turn words on the page into real locations where tragedies occurred. Along with this are pictures of the survivors in cemeteries or at gravesites of their loved ones. There are ten such stories in the collection that include cemetery or grave pictures, and each one reminds the reader of the ties between the living and those who are missing or dead. This direct approach to presenting the pain and suffering of the war does not shelter the reader from the war's horrors and is thus extremely effective at impacting the reader emotionally and making them pay attention to the feelings of loss the survivors live with.

In addition to these poignant pictures of locations that have become important to those who have lost loved ones are the pictures that catalogue what those loved ones left behind. In many cases, what remains are only the most heartbreaking remnants of a life. One such story describes how a son who was supposed to be on his way home after completing his military service never arrived and was found nine years after the war, dumped in a ditch on the side of the road with a bus ticket that would take him home in his pocket. Another impactful example details how a mother returned to her burned-down home after the Srebrenica massacre in which her husband and two sons were executed and found only a school workbook and a single marble. While each story's text conveys the emotion of these remnants, when the reader flips the page and sees, for example, the single marble lying in the open palm of a mother who has nothing else to remember her son by, or the bus ticket that was supposed to bring a son home, the emotional response becomes much fuller for the reader due to the complementary significance of the visuals.

The final category of pictures in *Missing Lives* – survivors living "normal" lives – is intimately tied to the truth of the entire collection, which is that the Bosnian War ended, yet its effects live on and continue to impact the lives of those who survived it. The power of these photos of survivors carrying on in regular life is that their lives can never truly be the normal we associate with innocent tranquility and happiness. Instead, their new normal is plagued by a never-fading sense of loss and an irremovable realization about the evil of humanity. Thus, though a photo of a man fishing on the same river that his parents' dead bodies floated down after they were dumped into it may not look like much on its own, the context of the photo and this man's ties to the river – both in life when he and his father would fish and swim in the river, and in death when he remembers it as the force that carried his parents 109 kilometers downriver

– give this visual tremendous ability to stir an emotional response in the readership of *Missing Lives*. Poignantly, this is only one such example of photographs of survivors doing their best to live normal lives in a world in which "normal" is no longer possible. A single example of this can be enough to create an impact on a reader, but all such examples in the book collectively add up to create an even more powerful impact on readers of *Missing Lives* and show with what difficulty the living must face each day because, in a way, the living also lost their lives.

Drawings

Books such as *Missing Lives* and others that feature photojournalism craft and control how the stories of those who survived the Bosnian War are presented, but books such as *Sjećam Se* present visuals directly from the survivors themselves. The results, though not as sophisticated in artistic nature or complex in what they convey, are actually quite impactful visuals due to the rawness of the artists' emotions and their intimacy to what they present. *Sjećam Se* is a book comprised of thirty-two entries by Bosnian women refugees who were displaced due to the Bosnian War. Each entry is presented first in original, handwritten Serbo-Croatian with an accompanying drawing, prior to being printed in typed Serbo-Croatian and translated into English, Spanish, and Italian. The handwritten entries and the accompanying drawings are the result of combining succinct writing with visuals that aid with their stunning simplicity.

The editors of *Sjećam Se* note that "each reader will come to his or her own understanding of these stories. Each story is many-layered; both in what it tells the reader and what is not directly said" (6). This is also true when visuals are in play, especially when these drawings intersect with writing they may not directly represent. These writings in *Sjećam Se* do not often directly confront or discuss the horrors of the Bosnian War or the sufferings these

women writing from refugee camps have endured. Consequently, the visuals of *Sjećam Se*, though they are not all necessarily easily accessible to the viewer through obvious visual representation of the written words, carry a great deal of emotional weight and provide additional meaning and depth to complement the words of the women refugees.

A prominent example of this is the theme seen throughout the drawings of emptiness. Emptiness can be a tricky concept to present visually since one disrupts emptiness as soon as one draws anything, but scattered through *Sjećam Se* are various examples of women using chairs and benches to represent the new emptiness caused by the war. One such drawing features an empty bench placed under the awning of a beaten-down birch tree; another shows a line of four chairs of different styles and one bench in a line, all empty; a third shows schoolroom desks that sit empty; the fourth shows a bench with a solitary woman sitting on it, perhaps the most empty of all despite her presence because one can feel the loneliness of her situation. At the most basic level, the chair exists for the sake of human use and the emptiness rings louder upon seeing the space where bodies should be, desks where laughing children should be sitting at school, and benches where friends should be gossiping and enjoying each other's company. This emptiness is not necessarily evident from the written words of these women, but their drawings are able to convey emptiness through strikingly simple visuals of chairs that are missing their people due to the disruptions and consequences of war.

Though the emptiness of chairs is an effective way to visually create a response in the reader, another drawing in *Sjećam Se* takes the opposite approach to emptiness by instead showing a classroom full of students sitting at their desks in order to create an emotional response (Figure 1). This drawing is one of the busiest in the collection as it shows the layout of the classroom, music notes floating in from outside the classroom window, the numbers 3, 4, and

5 repeatedly scattered across the drawing, and – most poignantly – the names of the teacher's students written on the drawing. Whereas the drawings of empty chairs (including the drawing of empty school desks) more directly show that the women have been displaced from where they lived and belonged, causing those places they used to sit in to now be empty, the full classroom reflects the past in a way that presents it as something that cannot be returned to because the drawings of empty chairs and classroom desks are the new truth of the war. The full classroom

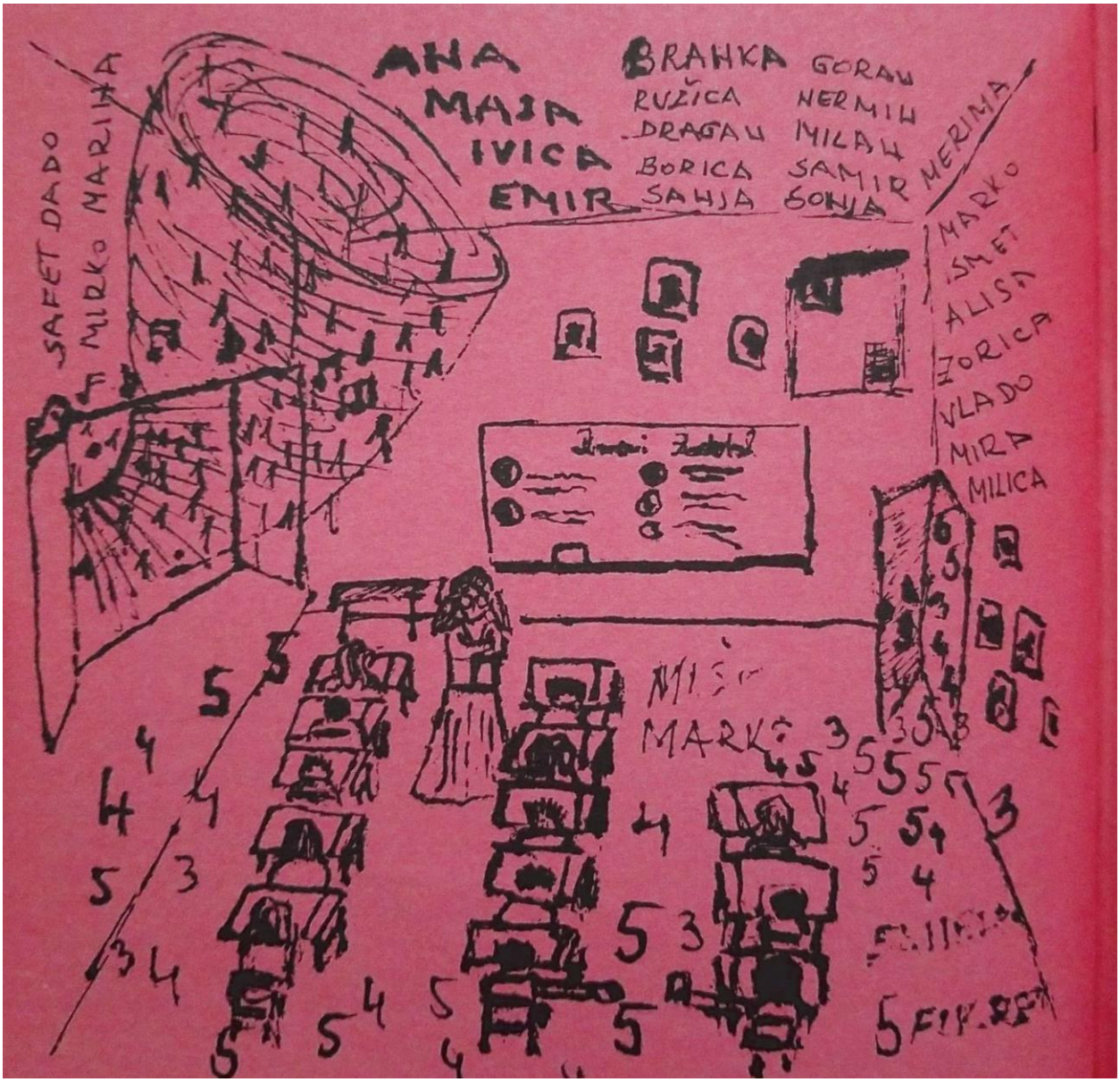


Figure 1 Sjećam Se, entry #5

with music floating in and children bustling around the room is something that has been entirely lost. Whereas the other women who drew empty chairs show the current state of displacement and disruption, this crowded drawing of the classroom stirs the viewer emotionally because of the underlying weight of all that has been lost. The teacher who drew this drawing even writes, "Never again will I step into a classroom. After this class I have nothing more to say" (*Sjećam Se*, entry #5).

Whether showing the past or the present in their drawings, the women are all bound together by a shared longing to return to their homes and the lives they led prior to the war. The drawings they create and the stories they tell do not always suggest that such a return is possible because the stories are told from within refugee camps and the drawings visually confirm the sufferings of the war through concepts such as emptiness and loss. However, *Sjećam Se* brands itself as a book that highlights the resiliency and hope that endure within these women even after the sufferings they have been through. One final drawing of note shows a candle giving light against a dark background and warding off the blackness trying to seep into its light. It is an image that can serve as the representation for the entire collection and one that confirms the power of visuals to convey that which a text is not always able to.

Physical Form of the Book

Thus far, the discussion of visuals has centered on those that appear within books as a way to support their respective texts and convey emotions and ideas that written words cannot. However, another important part of the discussion of visuals is that of how the memoirs and other examples of life writing physically appear because their forms can also contribute to the visual impact of the work. An easy entrance into this concept is the realization of how form is intricately linked to the number of contents of a book. In collections such as *Sjećam Se* or

Missing Lives, for example, the physical form of the book is tied to how many stories each binds together to share in the collection. In this way, the visual impact of the book can start with a simple of an observation about the thickness of the book and the number of stories of suffering that each contains. In this way, visually seeing the quantity of entries gives the reader an idea of the number of people who survived the war long enough to share their stories but also suffered tremendously in their survivals. A consequence of this, however, is the realization that the stories presented in memoirs and collections are only a fraction of those that are out there to tell. The number of people who lost loved ones and suffered through the Bosnian War is infinitely greater than any multitude of volumes could contain, and the unfortunate truth is that there are stories that will never – and can never – be shared. In this way, the visual contents and breadth of a memoir or collection both impact the reader by showing how many people have suffered and by serving as a stark reminder that this number hardly compares to the shocking total of those who suffered because of the war and its aftermath.

Another example of physical form visually emphasizing sheer volume is the cover of *Missing Lives*, which uses a system of dots and circles to visually denote the number of missing lives as a result of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The book's cover pairs a beautiful picture of the Bosnian countryside in the background with an "infographic" faintly overlaid on it and accompanied by a "key" to the visual on the book's back cover. The key reveals that each dot represents one of the 34, 389 people who have gone missing in the region since 1991, while the dots within circles show the 19,168 people who have since been identified. This leaves 15,221 uncircled dots stretching across the front and back covers of the book and putting into context just how widespread this tragic issue is. This cover visually symbolizes the numbers of those still missing and those who have been found, as well as creating a kind of irony in the fact

that there are countless of thousands of people who have felt the loss of the 34, 389 people that have gone missing, yet *Missing Lives* only can feature fifteen such stories. This once again reinforces the sad truth that thousands of stories will go untold and many will suffer without sharing their losses or finding a community to help them heal and recover from all they have endured.

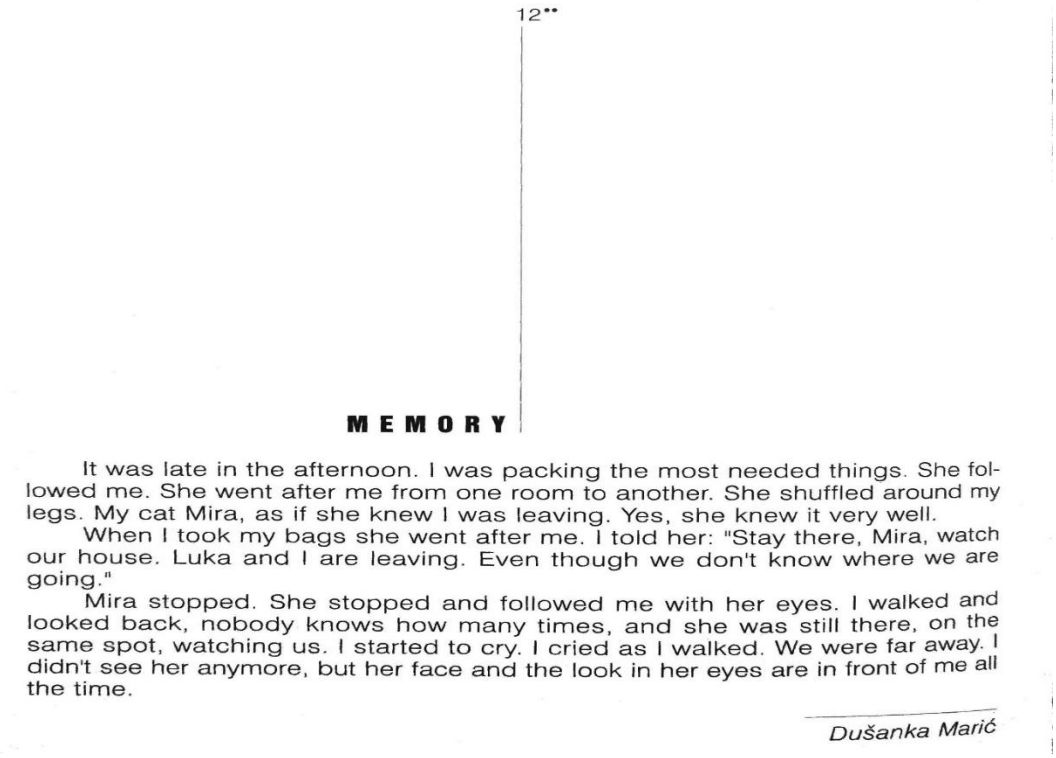
Just as choices are made in how to craft portraits of survivors to convey the weight they carry due to missing their loved ones, and about how to represent through drawing that which cannot be conveyed in words, choices are also made about how to visually present words. *Sjećam Se* is an interesting place to begin such a discussion because its editors made several conscious choices about how to visually present words, the first of which is about language. While the book collects thirty-two stories, each story actually appears five times in a row. The first two times are in Serbo-Croatian (first as the handwritten original by the author and then as a typed version of what the woman wrote) and this is followed by translations into English, Italian, and Spanish. Deciding to translate texts – and deciding which languages to translate them into – is a conscious choice by the editors and quite a smart one since their goal is to share the stories of these women and increase awareness of what they were going through. However, translation ultimately highlights the need for translation, meaning that, without it, the stories these women share would essentially be trapped – and therefore marginalized – within a language not many outside of the Balkan region are familiar with. Thus, increasing accessibility of the text by translating it into three languages is a very powerful and important step that allows for a wider readership that can pay attention to these happenings and for the text itself to have a wider impact on its readership. English and Spanish are top-four world languages in terms of numbers of speakers, and Italy is the "most significant" large country geographically close to Bosnia.

Choosing these languages as the ones to translate the women's stories into was no accident; instead, it is a testament to the power of word presentation and how to increase the reach of the book.

The discussion of physical form continues with *Sjećam Se* and its use of pink-colored pages and postcard-esque presentation of each entry. The original handwritten stories and drawings by the Bosnian women refugees are each printed on pink paper, while the typed transcription of their writing – as well as the three translations – all appear on regular white paper. This is a visual touch that aids the reader in being able to easily discern where one entry ends and the next begins, but also carries within its color various stereotypical associations. Using the color pink is certainly an editorial choice, and though the pink pages do not directly impact or affect either the words on the page or the drawings done by these women, it does visually work to establish a tone for the collection. The color pink is often viewed as a feminine color and thus, without even reading the stories of these women, one could likely guess that this is a book that deals with women. This is, of course, a stereotype about women and preconceived notions of the characteristics of colors, but whether one believes that the choice of pink devalues their stories or not, the important part is that *visually* the pink pages help add to the collection's tone as a book of war survival stories that is much softer and more domestic than many other collections, regardless of if we as readers like this fact or not. Furthermore, the pink pages help to visually reinforce the fact that these entries were all written by women and with this comes an understanding of the generally-perceived innocence of women (and children) during war. It is the commonly held belief that women and children should be spared during war, yet this book is proof of the unfortunate truth that no one – including women – was free of suffering during the Bosnian War. There is a certain delicateness and innocence to the color pink as it is presented

within *Sjećam Se*, and its visual significance aids in the creation of the tone that the words and drawings match.

Finally, the entries – or, more specifically, the translations that follow the original handwritten words that are printed on pink pages – in *Sjećam Se* appear formatted almost as if they were printed on the backs of postcards (Figure 2). The most prominent feature of the back of a postcard is the center line that divides the section in which one writes their message from the section where the address goes, and it is this center line that makes the entries in *Sjećam Se* appear almost as if they were on a postcard. For the entries, the center line extends from the top of the page and runs until it meets the first line of words in the entry. (The words are aligned towards the bottom of the page rather than starting at the top of a page and running downwards.) Though there is no split of the actual words (i.e. the center line does not cut words apart, but simply extends to meet them), the visual is still that of a postcard. Whether such a visual was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MEMORY

It was late in the afternoon. I was packing the most needed things. She followed me. She went after me from one room to another. She shuffled around my legs. My cat Mira, as if she knew I was leaving. Yes, she knew it very well.

When I took my bags she went after me. I told her: "Stay there, Mira, watch our house. Luka and I are leaving. Even though we don't know where we are going."

Mira stopped. She stopped and followed me with her eyes. I walked and looked back, nobody knows how many times, and she was still there, on the same spot, watching us. I started to cry. I cried as I walked. We were far away. I didn't see her anymore, but her face and the look in her eyes are in front of me all the time.

Dušanka Marić

Figure 2 An example of the postcard style of Sjećam Se (Sjećam Se, entry #12)

used intentionally or not, the important part for the viewer is the impact such a presentation of the words can have. Postcards are often known as a fun, trivial form of mail communication – the stanchion of "Wish you were here!" and idyllic pictures of sunsets or tourist attractions – but the obvious truth of *Sjećam Se* is that the words written on its "postcards" deal with much heavier subject matters. Thus, there may be ambiguity about whether having entries somewhat resemble the form of a postcard is good or bad because it may be seen as trivializing that which is undeniably tragic, but on the converse, the form does somewhat mirror the purpose of the collection, which is to collect short snippets from women and "send" (read: distribute) them to readers around the world. The postcard format means that each entry is short and digestible, but, just like with *Missing Lives* only being able to feature fifteen stories out of the thousands who have been or are still missing loved ones, the brevity of the entries in *Sjećam Se* reminds the reader just how much remains unsaid and how few of the stories from the war we will actually come to know and learn. Thus, the postcard format both presents a visual that mirrors the purpose of the collection in creating short "deliverables" to the general public, and conveys the inherent sadness that comes with the reduction of survivors' stories to just one entry on the back of a "postcard."

Graphic Memoirs

Thus far, the discussion of visuals within life writing dealing with the Bosnian War has focused on visuals that are at least supplementary – and in some cases, secondary – to the text of each work they appear in. Now, however, we turn to the genre of the graphic memoir and specifically Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, a graphic memoir chronicling Sacco's first-hand experience collecting stories and eye-witness accounts in Goražde, a town in Bosnia declared (largely ineffectively) to be a safe area by the United Nations during the Bosnian War. Though

Safe Area Goražde is inherently more visual than the other works examined thus far, there are many similarities that exist in terms of authorial intention and the various strategies used to create a response in the reader. As Edward C. Holland and Carl T. Dahlman write, "Like an author, a comics creator uses and recombines texts and narrative conventions but also makes a set of choices about the method and technique of visual representation; choices that translate into a legible media format" (204). Just as in other works examined thus far, when authors had to make choices about what pictures to include in order to achieve their desired tone, or where to take portraits of survivors in order to convey a certain emotion to accompany the survivor's story, Sacco also makes choices about the visuals in his work, with the most obvious difference being that his is a work that depends much more on the visual aspect of each story he tells. With that being said, in *Safe Area Goražde*, Sacco's choices appear in several critical forms: not shying away from the depiction of graphic violence, Sacco's appearances within his own drawings, and the use of black-bordered vignettes that visually separate his own first-hand experience from the stories shared with him that he then depicts.

The first of Sacco's choices is the decision to prominently feature the violence of the Bosnian War within his memoir. Though there is "inherent subjectivity in Sacco's work [that] arises from his artwork since drawings are fundamentally interpretive" (Kavaloski 2), the visual power of the violence *Safe Area Goražde* features leaves little room for the reader to fail to comprehend the horrors of the Bosnian War. "Sacco himself avows that an artist must rely on imagination when deciding how to aesthetically depict an event" (Kavaloski 2), and this is why it is worth examining Sacco's choices to prominently feature violence in his memoir. Sacco has a desire for real-life likenesses and to depict scenes truthfully, which often meant exchanging emails about specifics of scenes and events with his Goražde-based Bosnian friend Edin even

after Sacco left Bosnia and the war had been over for multiple years. When analyzing the violence Sacco features, the most significant aspect of these violent scenes that he depicts is that they are there at all. Not shying away from the violence of the war – and especially the violence rendered against innocent civilians – Sacco's work brings the reader closer to a feeling of presence than possibly any other visuals produced in life writing during the Bosnian War.

To glimpse the violence of *Safe Area Goražde*, one need only open the book to any page and experience some of the war symptoms that Sacco frequently depicts: destroyed buildings, dead bodies, mass graves, tanks, soldiers, armies, weapons, blood, brutality carried out against innocent people, injured people (including children) on crutches or missing body parts, and the suffering written on nearly every face in the book. Such violence is the truth of the experience in Goražde during the Bosnian War, but including it so prominently is a choice that we must examine. As Holland and Dahlman write, "choices are made about style, format, and theme…and these creative choices are iteratively influenced by ex post facto interpretation and audience response" (205). Since we are interested in audience response to effective strategies, we now examine what visuals featuring such graphic violence actually do for the reader and how such visuals achieve their desired effect.

Recalling this chapter's introduction of visuals and the "wound culture that demands fresh images to sustain its appetite" (Walker 70), such "explicit violent imagery could be considered exploitative and voyeuristic" in *Safe Area Goražde* except for Walker's argument that "Sacco uses it to restore a sense of humanity to those dehumanized by the pace of globalized media" (69). In this way, featuring such extreme violence is necessary not only because it conveys the truth of the war to a readership likely unfamiliar with such horrors, but also because it proves to be an effective strategy to rehumanize the conflict and the consequences of war.

Often, numbers of casualties are included in texts on wars, and deaths and horrors may be described, but too often, when such horrors are left to the written word, the reader may fail to fully comprehend the extent of the horrors. It can be easy to gloss over numbers of deaths when reading because the brain cannot always conceptualize the numbers and transform the numbers into a proper understanding of quantity. Though difficulty with conceptualizing large numbers even happens in *Safe Area Goražde*, which details how more than 700 people were killed and nearly 2,000 wounded during the 1994 offensive against Goražde (Sacco 187), one can, while *viewing* Sacco's graphic memoir, visually count the number of dead and wounded bodies on the page. In this way, a reader can see the loss of life adding up throughout the memoir, creating a form of understanding that is only possible through the effective strategy of using visuals to tell the story of Goražde, its people, and its victims.

In the research written about the visuals of *Safe Area Goražde* thus far, a large portion of attention has been paid to the gore of the book. Indeed, Sacco "provides plenty of imagery that would fascinate those searching for gore" (Walker 78), and both Walker and Kavaloski center in on one of the goriest scenes in *Safe Area Goražde* in which 200-300 people are killed on a bridge over the river Drina. This scene, along with others that show mass graves, executions, and people fleeing while under attack, all contribute to the goriness of the visuals within the memoir, but I argue that *Safe Area Goražde* is as much a study in facial expressions as it is in being able to stomach the horrors of the war that are visually rendered on the black-and-white pages. Though the book would be largely different without the gore that it features, the facial expressions in the book would be able to carry the tone of *Safe Area Goražde* on their own had Sacco created a book comprised solely of panels showing individuals' faces as they told their stories. While the gore is effective for conveying the atrocities of the Bosnian War, the faces are powerful in their

own right because they are able to visually cross into the reader's world so that one cannot remain aloof to the words on the page. The faces of these people as they share their stories say as much – if not more – about the horrors they have experienced and the true shock that comes with recognizing the brutality of former friends and neighbors – as well as humanity in general.

The faces of individuals, and what their faces either are or aren't doing in Sacco's renderings of them, has as much to do with conveying the tone – and often horror – of the eyewitness accounts they have to tell. One such face is that of an individual named Rasim (Figure 3). His story appears in a black-bordered vignette (Sacco 109-119) and he is the one who actually relates the massacre on the bridge that many other scholars have focused on for the power of its violent visuals. An elderly, mustachioed man, Rasim recounts one of the more horrifying scenes in the memoir and details how he witnessed the throat slittings and executions that occurred on the bridge, as well as how, when he had to cross the bridge, he "saw a lot of blood, maybe ten meters around and two centimeters deep" (Sacco 115). Despite the horrors that he has seen, Sacco depicts Rasim relating his story with an extremely lifeless face. Indeed, Rasim's face appears alone in its own panel six times in the ten-page vignette, and each time his face looks entirely devoid of emotion and life. It is the closest Sacco comes to copying panels within the entire memoir because Rasim's face simply doesn't change and his face appears nearly identical in each panel. His face is deadpan, but even more unsettling is the lifelessness within that must have killed off – or at least dulled – Rasim's emotional responses to the horrors he has seen. This is an effective visual strategy because it forces the viewer to consider their own personal emotional response, as well as recognize that some things cannot be unseen. Bearing witness to the horrors one has seen can leave a person irreparably altered, and Rasim's monotone face is a stark contrast to the horrors of the story he tells. His face shows the lifelessness of the living

while the horrors of the deaths he has witnessed surround his lifeless face in the vignette's panels, giving pause to the reader and proving to be an effective use of visuals.

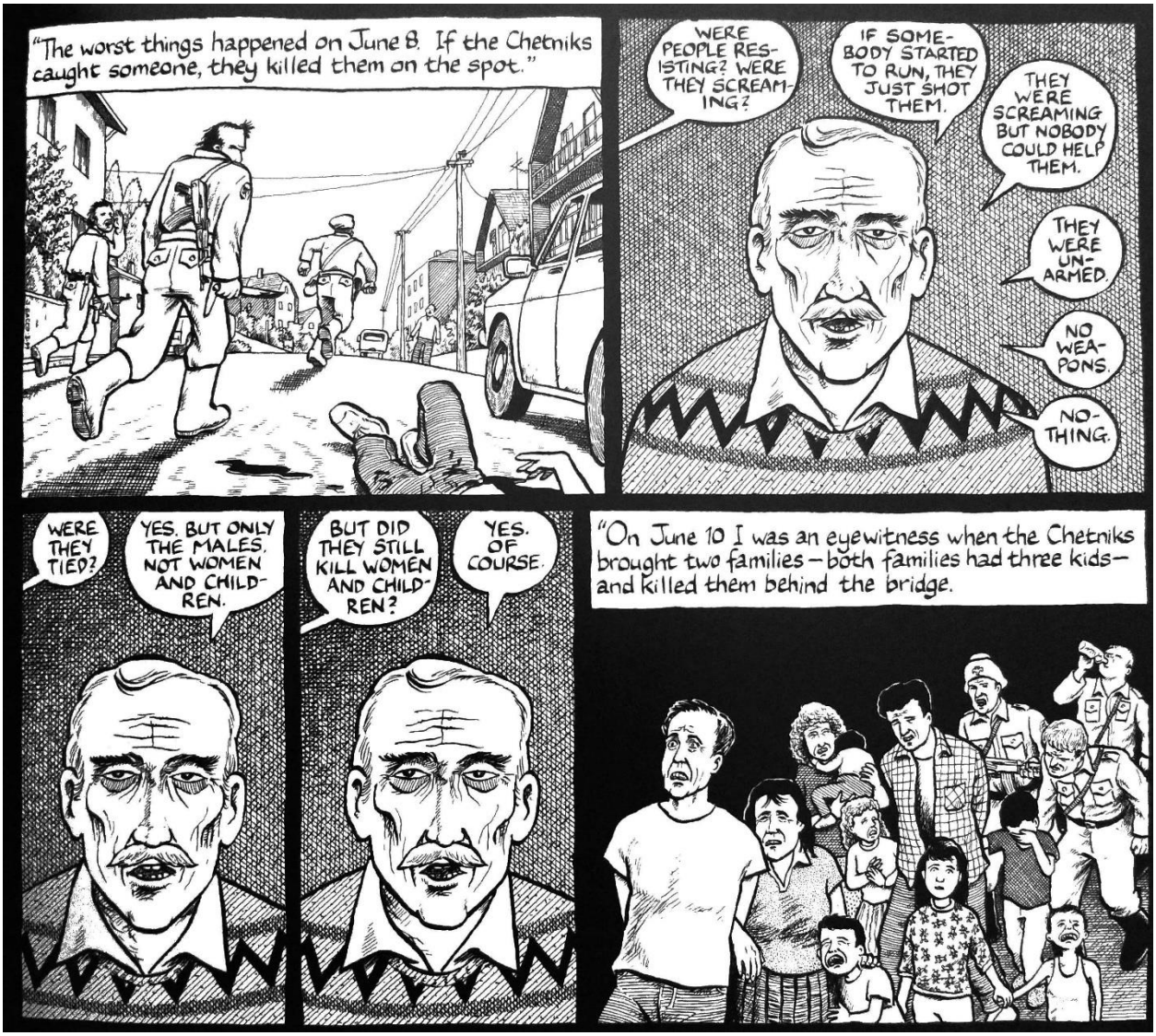

Figure 3 Panels showing Rasim's face in Safe Area Goražde (Pg.111)

Even when individuals are not talking, and even when they remain unknown and unnamed, their faces contribute to the visual impact of *Safe Area Goražde*. In Figure 4 (Sacco 206), these individuals are presented in a crowd yet each face still has its own expression. Combined, they all look like a horde of zombies, epitomizing the lifelessness of the living and shocking the reader with the destitution and pain on their faces. The individuals in this panel are

looking for food and gasoline, and their faces make it clear they are people who have had to learn to live without common items that the war has turned into luxuries. Having that many detailed faces staring out at the reader from one single panel shows how the suffering of Goražde plays out on both an individual and mass scale, putting into context the number of people afflicted by the Bosnian War and the individual struggles they are all enduring.

Figure 5 (Sacco 180) shows the power of an individual face, even when that face only appears once in the entire memoir and remains unidentified. The face is most prominently characterized by the harrowing black eyes of a war-torn child. The eyes, shrouded in darkness and accompanied by a defeated posture suggestive of the despondency of his situation, are the darkest part of this respective panel and effectively shut out any pretense of peace that the preceding panel proclaims. Accompanied by the simple line "But the Serb attack continued" (Sacco 180), the child's face – dominated by those black eyes – conveys the ever-increasing hopelessness of the situation for the citizens of Goražde. The hope for the city and its citizens is becoming increasingly ephemeral, just like this face, surrounded as it is with trails of smoke and flame and located next to a building that will cease to exist in a short time. Though this face is joined in its panel by the gore of a detached leg and foot and the rubble of a burning building, the most prominent aspect in the frame is the eyes, proving the power of faces to communicate the horrors of the war and to visually impact the reader.

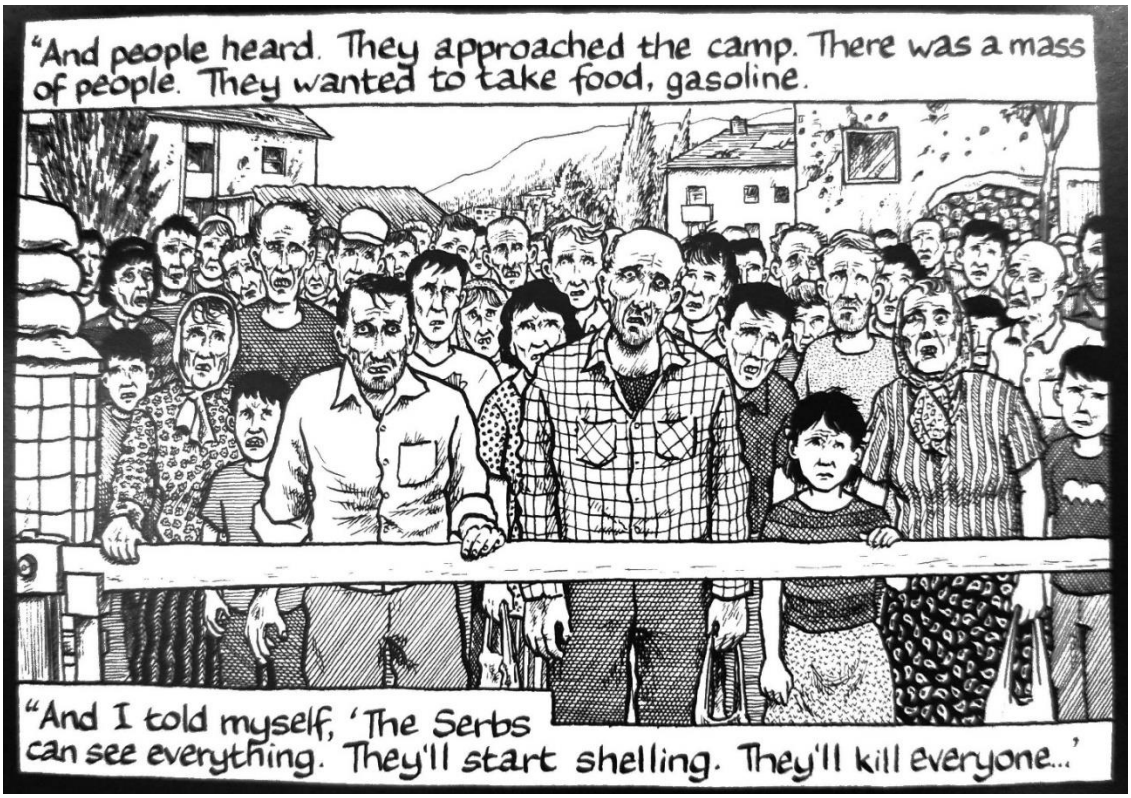

Figure 4 Safe Area Goražde (Pg. 206)

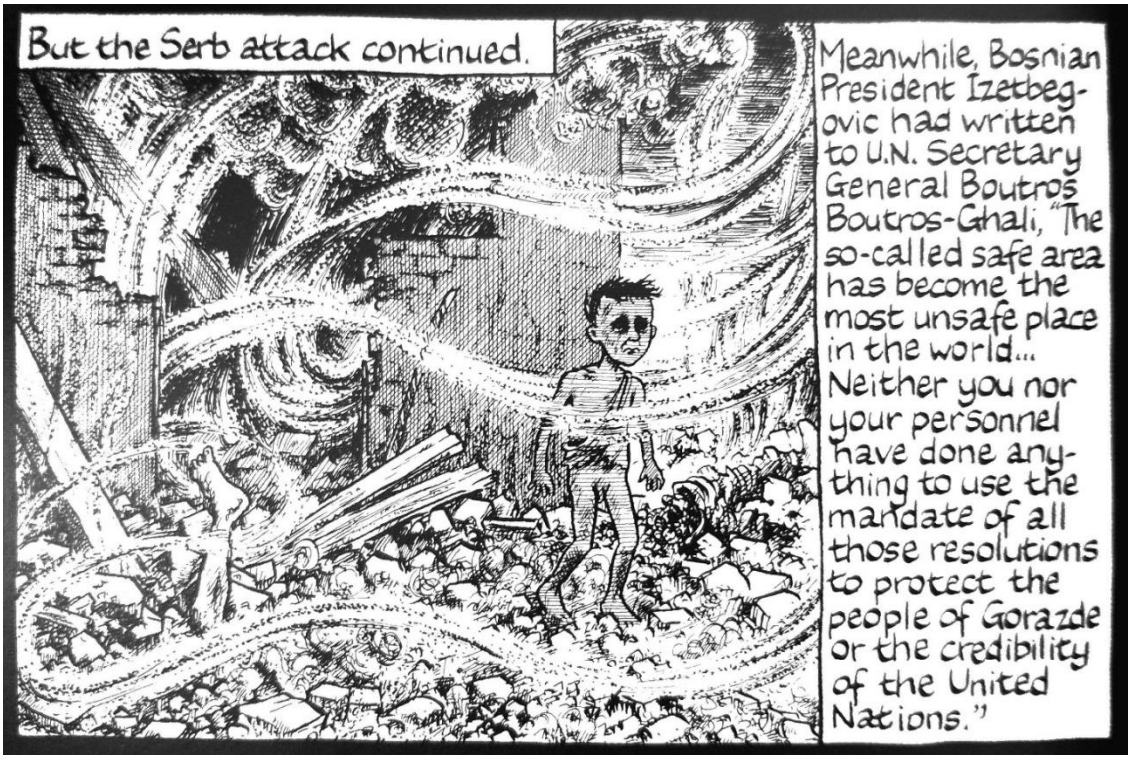

Figure 5 Safe Area Goražde (Pg. 180)

Figure 6 Sacco, middle, never appears in the text without his coke-bottle glasses (Safe Area Goražde 28)

Continuing the discussion of the visual impact of faces in *Safe Area Goražde*, we cannot fail to examine the face of Sacco himself since he draws himself into the narrative. Whether he does so, as Christopher Hitchens writes in the introduction to *Safe Area Goražde*, "as if [Sacco] wanted us to forgive him a little" (Hitchens), Sacco does appear frequently within the pages of his work, though not often as the center of focus in the panels he appears in. Walker writes that Sacco "draws himself into the background as a near-constant figure whose presence dismantles the conceit of detached journalistic objectivity" (75), yet while Sacco's experience in Goražde clearly shows his emotional engagement with the citizens of Goražde and his sympathy for their side of the conflict, there is something about his face that makes his presence more objective: his glasses (Figure 6). Throughout *Safe Area Goražde*, Sacco's face is always obscured by blank coke-bottle glasses, making it difficult at times for the reader to form an understanding of his

emotions and thoughts visually. The veiled eyes of Sacco have indeed been a point of interest for critics who "frequently focus on how the comic journalist's simplistic self-portrayal turns him into a substitute for the universal, an avatar or cipher into which we can place ourselves" (Salmi 418). Going further, "Sacco's spectacles are supplements to our own gaze, allowing entry for the price of a comic book into dark places far from the tourist track" (Walker 76). Whereas previous discussion about faces has been focused on what they show about the horrors of the war and its impact on those sharing, Sacco's face is notable because it does not show as much. This is not to say that his face is not emotive, but rather that it conveys a sense of being closed off since the viewer does not have access to his eyes. However, by covering his eyes with the coke-bottle glasses, Sacco leaves room for the reader to enter into the narrative and bear witness along with him to all that is happening in Goražde. With veiled eyes, Sacco's emotions do not overpower or overtly influence those of the reader; instead, Sacco, though present, disappears more into the background of the panels and, like the reader, performs his viewership knowing that he is ultimately an outsider to the world he is partaking in. By rendering his experiences and the stories he is told visually, he allows other outsiders, in the form of his readership, to enter this world and experience Goražde. The importance of Sacco's visual choice of obscuring his own eyes is significant because "the spectacles represent a tool for witnessing for Sacco and the reader. They are a 'white screen' upon which trauma can be projected and reconstituted" (Walker 76). It may seem strange for blank eyes to be able to bear witness, but "Sacco, who bases his texts on interviews and first-hand accounts, does indeed take on the position of a witness" (Salmi 418). Furthermore, his blank glasses allow for the reader to enter the memoir and bear witness as well to all that has happened in Goražde. This is a very important visual choice for Sacco to make because, while the empty coke-bottle glasses at first unsettle the reader,

as Sacco becomes more and more interwoven in the text and disappears into the background even when he is present in panels, the reader, too, becomes more interwoven with the narrative.

The final visual choice to examine in *Safe Area Goražde* is the use of black-bordered vignettes. This structure has been well-noted by scholars who point out the differences between the white-bordered chapters, which "feature Sacco's first-person voice, his irony, his image, and a visual language that is more fluid and experimental" and the black-bordered vignettes, which "embody a third-person historical narrative with a linear chronology and a visual language that relies on clear borders and right angles" (Kavaloski 11). Though a reader would likely be able to distinguish the shift in narration and the more historical focus of the black-bordered sections without the aid of the color differentiation, choosing to implement these color differences is a very important visual choice Sacco makes to "distinguish between events of the past in which he was not involved and the clear-bordered panels of events for which he was present" (Walker 76-77). This lends a sense of history to the black-bordered sections as Sacco is retelling the life experiences of Goražde citizens who simultaneously recall the tranquility of pre-war Bosnia and recount the horrors of a Bosnia during war. Going further, Sacco uses these black-bordered sections to inform the reader about the history of the Balkans as a region and about the timeline of the Bosnian War. Sacco himself "even characterized these chapters as 'the historical track that took the reader chronologically through the major incidents of the war'" (Kavaloski 8). The history of the war could hardly be called secondary to the tales of Sacco's own adventures in Goražde, as *Safe Area Goražde* contains eight black-bordered vignettes that comprise 100 pages of the 227-page graphic memoir. These black-bordered sections are an important reminder of the power of visuals. Though much of the focus on *Safe Area Goražde* has focused on the power of Sacco's visuals to shock or unsettle the reader, the vignettes are the house for both some of the

most horrifying visuals included in the memoir (as discussed earlier) and for the most informative and educational parts as well. Sacco writes in the bibliography to *Safe Area Goražde* that "I never intended this book to be a comprehensive overview of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia. However, I found it necessary to provide some context in order to tell the story of Goražde" (Sacco, bibliography). In order to educate his readers about the history of the Bosnian War, Sacco pulls in history of the region, the commentary issued by politicians such as President Bill Clinton and high-ranking officials from the United Nations about the war, provides background on the formation of Yugoslavia, including its ethnic composition, and uses maps to help illustrate the movement of armies during the Bosnian War and the locations of important cities and sites. Though his historical sections were born out of a necessity to form the context in which to center his own narrative and that of the Goražde citizens, the historical sections are nevertheless effective in educating the readership, and one of the major ways this is done is through Sacco's use of maps, which "underlie the process of communicating the history of the war in Bosnia to the readership of Sacco's graphic narratives" (Holland 90). Maps are ultimately at the root of the geo-political conflict going on in the Balkans at this time. The entire region was undergoing a seemingly continuous redrawing of the maps as Yugoslavia broke up into newly independent countries, followed by Serbia cleansing regions on the map of their ethnically Muslim populations during the Bosnian War, and ultimately when peace was finally established in Bosnia with the Dayton Agreement that resulted in the redrawing of Bosnia into two sections, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the predominantly Serbian region called Republika Srpska. Sacco seems to understand this critical point because he devotes many panels throughout his graphic memoir to maps both on a national and small scale. Furthermore, Kavaloski writes that "by incorporating traditional cartography, Sacco presents a distant and

objective perspective of moments in the history of the Balkans" (9). It is this "objective perspective" that allows these black-bordered sections to serve as educational sections and a reminder that sometimes visuals can be a learning tool and are not always just a way for an author to horrify or create an emotional response in their readers. This objectivity extends in the black-bordered sections to the stories that Goražde citizens share with Sacco and that he subsequently represents visually within the black borders of these sections. It is worth noting that Sacco never draws himself into a single panel of these black-bordered sections, even as a listener in panels where the story-teller is depicted (as they often are) in front of a blank background as they recount the horrors they have seen. These vignettes combine historical elements with interspersed perspectives shared by people who are distinctly *not* Sacco and do not share his narrative voice. In this way, these sections are also forms of personal history that work as a way of preserving the sufferings and misfortunes of those whose individual stories and pain will likely be forgotten in history. These individuals who share their stories within the pages of the black-bordered vignettes are able to do so with their own voices and from their own first-person perspectives and thus can take an active role in making their story heard. It is a privilege not only to be able to preserve the story of what you have endured, but also to share your story with a person like Sacco who can make sure these citizens of Goražde are not forgotten about, as they felt they were during the war, and as the Bosnian War is largely forgotten about by the outside world today. Kavaloski calls *Safe Area Goražde* a "histori-graphic novel" (16), and in this way, the black color of these sections is wholly appropriate because this history of the Balkans, the Bosnian War, and the suffering of innocent citizens – while important to preserve – is indeed very dark and bleak, both for the individual sufferers and the nation as a whole.

The visuals in *Safe Area Goražde* often horrify, shock, or unsettle the reader, yet along with the shock factor of the gore come other choices about visuals that help to foster the tone of the memoir, educate the readership about the conflict leading up to the Bosnian War and the events that occurred during it, and the ability for the reader to enter into the narrative through Sacco's inclusion of himself in the narrative. With all of these combined, *Safe Area Goražde* proves to be a source of some of the best examples of effective strategies to impact readers.

CONCLUSION

"Many turned to writing to reach their own people and the outside world" (Carmichael 149).

These "many" are those who produced writing – some of it in the form of life writing – during the Bosnian War or in later response to it. The "outside world" is us, the readers of such works, who the people on the inside of Bosnia, the ones suffering and clinging to the remnants of their lives, are trying to reach. Whether or not they have reached us lies in whether or not these writers are able to effectively engage us. This research has detailed many specific ways in which these writers try to make us, as readers, pay attention to what they have to say despite any compassion fatigue, indifference, or apathy we may bring to the table when we engage with their writing. As this research has shown, these writers *are* able to do so and they *have been* getting through to us as readers, and are doing their part in helping us pay attention to the world and the suffering going on within it. Though there is still an element of the conscious choice that must be made about whether to engage with these topics or not, as demonstrated throughout this research, it only takes a second to choose to stop and engage with an effective strategy used in life writing, and only a few minutes more to analyze the strategy and begin to understand its impact and significance. This research has focused on a region and a topic that do not often get the attention they deserve, and while we now know that authors writing life writing about the Bosnian War *can* and *do* engage us as readers, what follows next is a question about what is to be done following that engagement.

For writers of life writing – and specifically life writing that deals with large-scale social issues or disruptions like wars or violations of human rights, the answer to "What happens next?" lies in the so-called "call to action" and the reader response. While the first – and most crucial –

step for engaging their readership is to get readers to actually read their texts, a call to action extends beyond simply reading about the problems in a region. The most important thing to remember about life writing dealing with topics such as war, human rights violations, and genocide is that it is a call for attention by someone whose plight has thus been ignored or marginalized to someone on the outside in the hopes of raising awareness of what is occurring and possibly securing critical outside help for the situation. This is where the "call to action" comes in, as it is a very human endeavor to pay attention to the sufferings of others, and the call to action invokes this responsibility we have to each other. While it is the author that is able to create the call to action through various strategies that impact their reader (many of which have been detailed here in this research), it is ultimately the reader's response that dictates whether any "action" will actually take place.

The concept of "reader response" is a very individualized one, differing with each person, but each person can still be effectively engaged by life writing. Reader response starts on the personal level of being able to take a moment to pause our lives and pay attention to that which is going on in the lives of others – or even to recognize those lives that are no longer being lived due to, for example, consequences of conflicts such as the Bosnian War. Reader response can take many forms, whether it be sharing the information we learn in life writing with others so that a single work can have a wider impact and we can educate those around us, or whether a reader response looks more like a reader processing their emotional responses to what they have read through the creation of their own writing, as I have done with my creative components that supplement my research presented here. The intersection of the "call to action" with the reader response is especially effective when the call to action reaches those that can more easily affect actual change in the lives of the writers of such life writing. Examples of this would include

politicians, human rights workers, and activists, but even for those who do not hold positions of power or influence, they may become the next generation of world leaders and difference makers or, at the very least (and this should not be devalued because it is critically important) make up a generation that is increasingly educated and aware of history and the world. Furthermore, such a generation is one much more likely to vote, organize for what they believe in, and empower the generations that follow them. These are the practical benefits of paying attention to life writing and continuing to pay attention to current events going on in the world. These are also a perfect point on which to continue research into the "call to action" put forth by life writing authors and the corresponding reader responses that are possible.

Ultimately, paying attention is about taking what we learn from life writing and making it matter in our own lives so that the lives that are lost are not forgotten or devalued, and so that those lives still being lived can be improved. When we reduce what we know about the Bosnian War to its absolute basics, we know – regardless of anything else – that the people of this region suffered tremendously. It is a suffering that outsiders can never fully understand, regardless of how many different life writing texts they choose to engage with or how many effective strategies they pay attention to. It is a suffering that far outweighs what we give back when we pay attention to these texts, which is only a little bit of our time and attention, and possibly a reader response. The Bosnian War is a war in which genocide indeed happened despite the cry of "Never again!" that followed the Holocaust. It is a war that saw forcible displacements of thousands of people, the longest siege of a city in modern history, mass rapes, massacres, the destruction of an entire country, and the outside world sitting idly by, hardly engaging with the region until absolutely no other option remained. It is a region and a people who have suffered tremendously and, if nothing else from this research resonates, let the one resonating factor be

that the simple action of paying attention and recognizing that such suffering occurred is extremely valuable in its own right, especially to a region and a people who have been devalued and largely forgotten about since – and even at times during – the Bosnian War.

This research has focused on specific authorial strategies that writers can use and include in their works in order to get us to pay attention to what they have to say, but the main point of this research extends far beyond whether an author uses, for example, effective visuals in their work, or whether they utilize dramatic irony, or whether they present the power imbalance between those who know versus those who do not. Ultimately, while the strategies analyzed in this research are what make the topic of paying attention objectively researchable, the main point of this project will always be that we, as readers and as citizens of the world, often do not pay attention, but that there are countless reasons why we should start doing so.

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APPENDIX A

The following two texts are creative components inspired by my personal experience learning about the Bosnian War and the emotional impact the stories of the war have had on me. They are as much a part of this thesis project as the research component itself because they acknowledge the very real emotions that I felt throughout the research process and they capture the reasons I wanted to research this topic to begin with. Without these components, the research is somewhat lacking the human aspect of this project which acknowledges what it feels like to suffer alongside the authors of the life writing I have read, and what it feels like to fail or struggle with paying attention at times. "The Siege" was written in February 2016 and details my imagined experience of visiting Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, for the first time. This text is presented here unchanged since when I wrote it as a freshman in college. Likewise, the second creative component, though written contemporaneously with this research project, begins with when I first learned about the Bosnian War as a sixteen-year-old. The tone and writing style are thus necessarily more raw and simplistic to depict these emotions and my thoughts as a younger version of myself. These two components depict the truth that it is largely impossible to research the Bosnian War – and any conflict in which innocent people suffer needlessly – without being impacted emotionally by what one learns. While the research component is largely objective and formal, these two components document the subjective emotions that one inherently experiences by spending time researching these subjects. They are what make this thesis whole and account for what it means to be a reader who acknowledges the shared humanity of the world.

The Siege

I

For the first two weeks it seemed like I
would spend my entire stay crying. The
woman who worked the register at the café
I usually stopped by in the mornings looked
concerned when she would see me, but she
never said anything. And why would she?
She and her people have seen so much
suffering. They have
felt it. They have *lived* through it. And
they don't need some despairing foreigner to
parade around with tear-streaks on her
face and pretend to understand the
depths of their sorrow. They are hardened
to the emotions that daily cleave me
and I have come to think this:
The living died too.

II

When I arrived it was dark and I
could not see their world. The morning,
wet and dreary, brought my first exposure
to the sights of suffering that are everywhere
here. Well, they're only symbolic of suffering,
because they're memorials and can't affect
anyone unless they have an effect. On
my first day walking the city I'd had
plans but everywhere I looked my
plans were made and my heart was
broken. The bench in the park that I have
sat on, sobbing, for two weeks is a good
friend now. He wasn't here when what
I cry over happened, but he is marked
by it just the same; carvings done
by adolescents looking for a projection
in the world.

III

On my second day the rain was gone
and I thought the beautiful weather would
make it hard to be sad. An elderly man

was speaking about how, back then on days
like this, the beautiful weather made him so
angry because he didn't want to die to go
outside and enjoy it. And I cried again.
And he looked towards me with scorn but
gave up the effort after the glance. Now,
even when he can go outside, inside he
remains, trapped by the days of old.

IV

I have to remind myself not to accuse them.
They are the ultimate victims, of course. But now they
have moved well into the latter stages of grief, in
which it takes a resoluteness to hold back the
memories, crushing memories, of then. I, in the
primary stage still, continue to weep as I sip my
morning coffee. This is something I thought I
understood when I wasn't here. Being here, I
understand now that understanding is painful.
I check the weather reports for tomorrow. I
predict my tears will match the rain the TV
man calls for.

V

Under the awning, I look out on the traffic of
umbrellas. These are shielding the hurrying citizens
from the water. They need heart shields instead. And if
they find any, I could use one too. Storming above
them and flooding at their feet, but I think about
the storms inside of them. These must be greater –
and longer enduring. I don't know if I'm
crying but I doesn't even matter. I forgot my
umbrella. I have to face both storms on my own.

VI

The bench I've become friends with is solid under
me. I'm annoyed by the laughter coming from the
park's playground. It's obvious to me someone is
happy. In five days I think I forgot how to be. I
haven't felt it and I'm glad; it's out of place
here. I want to go up to the young girls on the
swings and ask them if they feel the smothering

sorrow that is choking my throat but even if I could
walk over there I wouldn't want them to ask me
why I'm crying. How do I explain this has become
who I am.

VII

I wake up and decide to be a different person. I've been
holding off on seeing the graves – God, there are too
many to fathom – because I knew I wasn't strong
enough. Now, though, I gladly go because tears are
normal in a cemetery. I can hide my shameful
face here, the place where I see that the living
are still so. It is quiet there and I am thankful for
my silent tears. It is difficult to reconcile the peace of
the cemetery with the horrors that made this plot
necessary. There is a young boy with his mother. They're walking
down a row with purpose. I stand still. They have someone
specific to mourn. I weep in general. I don't know
which is worse.

VIII

I should think they'd have plenty of words
for how I feel but none of them feel right. I
say "I feel…" but the word I say sounds
fake, feels inadequate. At first I appreciated my
tears because they projected what I couldn't voice but
now, because of their regularity, they no longer move
me. They flow but are hollow, a pretense at this
point. My heart feels them fully every time but my
eyes wish they were dry and my mind wishes I
could will them so. I say "God, has it only been
a week?" but I am not even religious and look
what religion did to these people anyways.

IX

Art museums have always troubled me. I never
know how long I should linger in front of a
painting or a sculpture. How often have I
stood before something, placed a look of contemplation
on my face, stared blankly, and thought about the
appropriate time to be detained by the piece. And that's
just with art. I don't know how I ever expected
to move through a museum here. I get there as soon

as it opens but even then I know that the museum's
hours won't provide enough time for me to try to fully
pay my respects. If it would be permissible, I would
bring a chair inside. My legs grow weary standing
in front of the same memorial all day, knowing
there is no amount of time that will ever make it
appropriate to move on.

X

February 29. It's a significant day now. When I first
looked at my travel itinerary I was joyful to be granted
by the calendar an extra day here. Now, though, this extra
day just seems like a curse. But that's wholly selfish and I
critique myself. On this day, twenty years ago, the siege ceased
so maybe this should be a happy day. But it's hard to believe
in that because the lifting was only an official end to destruction
and suffering. The end has not yet been arranged for the
suffering of the people. There may never be one. When I
think of the end I cannot help but parallel to the beginning.
The contrast is a cruel one. But rather than wish for the days of
"before", I wish that none of this had ever had need to begin. Thus,
I wish for the impossible.

XI

If I were home and there were potholes on my
street I'd be annoyed. Here, however, the potholes make
me feel better. Simply: they are signs of normalcy.
This is the kind of destruction a city should face. Not
bombs and snipers and lost lives. The potholes make me
nervous, though, too. Any glimpse of what might be
war remnant destruction makes me worried. It is a
relief to determine them just to be potholes. I
never thought I'd root for potholes.

XII

It's not that I want the past to be erased; I
am here, after all, for the past. But the past is hard.
It's blunt. It's easier when I can see it when I
want to, when I can break it up into manageable
pieces and can prepare myself to look at them.
It's harder when the past confronts me when I'm
unprepared and forces me to look when I only want

to look away. Looking away doesn't help though. The entire world practiced doing so together for 1,425 days. That's plenty of practice. I should be ready to look now.

XIII

The day is silent and I'm feeling so cynical. If I listen hard enough it's as if I can almost make out the echoing of all the hollow promises leaders made twenty years ago. Ringing loudest is that of "Never again". Admittedly made much longer ago, it still is most powerful because, while issued in good faith, it's complete bullshit. Pardon my language. I don't use profanity but sometimes you just get so fed up, so tired. The people here know what I mean. Bullets, shells, promises, death. Promises. Promises. It's a lot to handle, I promise. And I'm facing an onslaught myself now. But I'm also plugging my ears because I don't want anyone's false hope, promises.

XIV

Right now, I think what scares me most is that there are parts of the city – and I find more and more every day – where there are no signs of the past. I've been so exposed to these signs that now their absence is just as striking. All I've been doing is lamenting the past and hating its power over me but now I hate that there are places where I can escape from it. Because as bad as it is to be forced to remember the past, it must be even worse to forget it.

APPENDIX B

As in the beginning of many adventures, out of curiosity, I picked up a book. A work of fiction, yet "based on true events," it was called *The Cellist of Sarajevo*.

"How true?" I wondered. I had been shocked to read it. Deeply moved. I remember crying. And as soon as I finished, I was online reading about the Bosnian War. Had such a war really happened? And less than 20 years ago from the time of my reading? Why had I never heard about this war before?

My mother was in the Army for many years. They actually tried to deploy her to Bosnia and Herzegovina once. She couldn't go because she had me and my sister to take care of. My dad was already deployed.

I ran from my room to hers to ask if she had ever heard about the Bosnian War. "Yes," she calmly said as I marveled at how I had never learned about the war in school or even heard of it before. She took me to the library that weekend. If school wouldn't teach me, I'd teach myself.

These trips to the library were routine for our family. The summer before I started fifth grade we moved 1,500 miles south. I didn't know anyone besides my mom, sister, and our two new puppies. We went to the library a lot that summer so we would have books to keep us occupied while my mom was at work. When she'd come home for the day, we would be experts on our topics.

My three topics for that summer were the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, the Holocaust, and arachnids (even though I'm terrified of spiders). All three topics horrified me in their own ways, but none more than the Holocaust.

I especially couldn't believe that the Nazis pulled prisoners' gold teeth out in the concentration camps without anesthetic. I'd had some teeth pulled (albeit at a modern-day dentist's office) and it seemed that I could relate to the excruciating pain these prisoners must have endured.

A decade later I read Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*. In this book Wiesel talks about Jews having their teeth pulled out. No anesthesia, no painkillers. I shrugged it off. Of course they had had their teeth pulled. That's just what happened. Somehow, something that had horrified me ten years prior now ceased to even give me pause.

You can call it growing up, "maturing," whatever you want, but the truth is that at some point in those past ten years I'd grown out of being horrified by the truly horrifying – though teeth being pulled is hardly the worst thing to have happened during the Holocaust.

Reading *The Cellist of Sarajevo* was the first time I realized that the type of atrocities that occurred during World War II and the Holocaust had occurred other places in the world since those times. It was a harsh awakening for me.

Now I was horrified not only by the Bosnian War itself, but also the fact that I didn't know anything about it prior to this chance encounter with a work of fiction based on true events. Then, things got even worse when I found out that Bosnia and Nazi Germany were not the only places genocide had occurred.

Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda…. Everyone knew about the Holocaust. We definitely learned about *that* one in school. But what happened to all these other atrocities? Did we just not care? Was there only space in the history textbook for "so much"? Did we find it all too depressing to worry about? Did we feel guilty for the failed promise of "Never Again" that world leaders issued after the Holocaust?

You know when a kid gets in trouble for picking on his sibling? The mom yells at the son, telling him not to treat his sister like that, and the boy says he is sorry and promises his mom he won't do it again. The mom rolls her eyes in acceptance, knowing that the apology and the promise mean only temporary peace for right now, but, because she's at her wit's end with her kids bickering back and forth, she'll take the temporary peace.

Is the entire world just a fibbing child? I want to believe our leaders when they promise "Never Again" for genocide and crimes against humanity, but, like the mom who accepts her son's apology so she can enjoy peace in the current moment, I now struggle to believe these promises can last into the future.

What if the real truth, instead of "Never Again" is "Regretfully, Again"? What then?

For myself, I found solace in reading and learning all I could about the Bosnian War in order to address what I felt were failures in my education and understanding of the world.

The solace comes from knowing that, in my own small way, I'm paying attention to the world around me and being a personal advocate for turning "Never Again" into a statement with actual truth and merit.

Is it enough to learn *something* about a topic which one can never know everything? In doing so, we must remember that learning *something* inherently leaves *something* out. Stopping to pay attention and learn is a venture one will always partly lose. Here is what I have gained:

Once upon a time there was a country most people I talk to still have never heard of. And in that country – WHILE THE WORLD WATCHED – genocide, concentration camps, massacres, the longest siege of a city in modern history happened.

When I learned that the United States danced around calling what was happening in Bosnia genocide because doing so would have initiated America's obligations to intervene in the region…. In that moment – and in moments following that initial disappointment – I was ashamed to be a citizen of a country that routinely sat by as genocide exploded around the world.

Somehow, the people, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the grandmas, the infants, the workforce, the traditionalists, mothers, fathers, children, but above all, the MUSLIMS – became the enemy as the world simply sat back and didn't want to help them.

Well, not really "somehow." At this point we know well enough how hatred, extreme nationalism, and feelings of superiority work to turn people against a group of those who are different from themselves.

But still, it infuriated me to read that people like Elie Wiesel, the world-renowned Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate who is extolled for speaking out against injustice in the world, visited Sarajevo and had the nerve to doubt that what was going on in Bosnia could be called genocide and to declare that Bosnian Muslims were guilty of "doing things comparable to what [the Serbs] are doing over there."

Tell me how all those Bosnian Muslims buried in mass graves after being massacred, or all those Bosnian Muslims who were victims of rapes, bombings, or sniper bullets are as guilty as the Serbian groups who perpetrated such violence. Tell me how the people in Sarajevo, the ones under siege for 1,405 days, the ones who were killed just trying to cross the street or retrieve water, tell me how they were just one of the "parties to the conflict" and not the victims of the conflict.

I don't think so.

The Bosnian War ended two years before I was born. Even though it was over before my life started, I've invested a lot of my recent life in reading memoirs, diaries journals, and historical accounts of the war and it has been very frustrating.

Somedays I feel I can't do anything to make a change or impact. Somedays I worry that maybe this suffering that has come as a result of hatred, intolerance, and extreme violence is just too much for anyone to fight. I have patches of time in which I think that maybe I shouldn't really worry about it at all because I can't do anything to change it.

When this happens, I remember everything I've ever read or seen about the war and the people who lived – or didn't – through it, and while sometimes it is not easy to be a consumer of such productions about the war, it is extremely important to me to not give up on the Bosnian people like the world did.

Sometimes, paying attention doesn't always feel that great. Sad. Angry. Disappointed. Ambivalent. Neutral. The rare lighthearted moment I feel bad for laughing at. But also, what happens when I finish reading something about the war?

If life writing about traumatic events is a way for writers to process what they have endured and potentially come to terms with their suffering, what does it do for the reader?

For me, emotions have been pretty mixed. On a good day I feel like I can change the world and that the world needs my voice and my passion. On other days, I feel all kinds of hopeless and guilty for feeling pained by what I read even though reading is much easier than actually living through what authors write about.

Every day at work I read the newspaper, sometimes several. Amidst the sports, stocks, and general news, are stories that should concern us all.

Routine bombings and air strikes in Syria. Genocide against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. The precarious state of feelings towards refugees around the world.

It takes effort to read all the way through those articles, though I admit the very nature of a news article format means I leave many articles unfinished.

I feel I am not doing enough here. Here I am on my soapbox about the Bosnian War and the trauma that occurred there and yet, as similar things happen around the world now, I can't even read to the end of a newspaper article. We must all be better.

When I was younger and still lived at home, my two dogs (those once-upon-a-time puppies we got when we moved south) were my audience for a lot of practice speeches, readings, and presentations.

Angels that they were, they clearly didn't follow my (hopefully) sophisticated arguments and well-developed ideas. Often they'd end up dozing while I talked at them.

As audience members, we don't always like what people have to say, and we may not always even be able to stay awake for it. A person's message may offend us, scare us, anger us, or simply not be worth our time.

But when those who are speaking have been or are going through the kinds of trauma many of us are luck to never know, Be There.

Do your best to pay attention.

And when we fall asleep, break off, lose focus, or forget the common humanity that binds us all, we wake up the next day and try again.

There. I feel better now.